



Knowing Our Kids as Both People and Readers

by JILL SCHECHTER



As the mother of two boys who are opposite in every way possible, I know that I need to navigate my selections and suggestions for them in everything, including books.

This is a tale of two brothers:

A tale of two brothers, both born in November, one year apart, one with blonde hair, one with brown.

A tale of two brothers, both ready to take on the world, one cautious and calculated, carefully evaluating his next move; one running at the chance to jump over a rainbow (if he can find his shoes and remember to put them on!).

A tale of two brothers, both following their passion, one running to join every team, throwing each ball and hitting each puck with precision and strength; one floating on a cloud, diving into each opportunity with creativity and optimism.

A tale of two brothers both giving their all to everything they do and excelling in their individual passions; one on the football field and in the hockey rink, one in the studio and on the stage.

A tale of one mother encouraging both of her boys, equally proud of them for all their accomplishments, and scratching her head wondering how these two are brothers?

As the mother of two boys who are opposite in every way possible, I know that I need to navigate my selections and suggestions for them in everything, including books.

As their mom, I know that the suggestion of participating in an art class for my son Hunter might lead to a stink eye to the proposer. Consequently, I know that forcing my son Teddy, a budding artist and dancer, to play in a soccer game or read a sports book would elicit tears.

How does this distinction translate into book suggestions in the library or the classroom? Why is it imperative that we get to know our students as readers and as people?

When you look at Teddy you see a typical third-grade boy with an F & P score of T. A well-intentioned and seasoned librarian (with 500+ students) would have access to his scores and might suggest Tim Green's best-selling fiction series knowing that these books fly off the shelves and are very popular with most of the 3rd and 4th grade boys. With the utmost respect for authority, this particular third-grade boy checks out a book that he will NEVER actually read and thus has lost this reading opportunity. Far worse, he is likely to question his joy for reading.

When you look at Hunter you see a boisterous sports fan who is eager to please. Knowing that Hunter LOVES sports, the same well-intentioned librarian might also suggest Tim Green's best-selling fiction series to him. Also respecting the librarian's authority, this particular fourth-grade boy would check out the book, take it back to his seat and pretend to read it quietly. Without taking the time to get to know Hunter, you wouldn't know that he finds fiction very hard to read and that he much prefers the layout of a non-fiction book. He, too, has lost this reading opportunity and is questioning his joy for reading.

Know Your Students: The First Step in Helping Your Students as Readers

Research has shown time and time again that the best way to increase test scores (unfortunately a priority in our educational system) and build our students' reading ability is for students to read for pleasure. Children who love their books will CHOOSE to read and naturally grow their personal reader's identity and ultimately their ability.

What can well-intentioned educators do to help students find that "just right" book? How can you help a student grow their reader's identity?

The answer is simple. Get to know your students as people AND as readers. Look at them as individuals. Bust up long outdated stereotypes. (Yes, Pink IS for Boys.) Learn their interests. Learn their abilities. Talk to them. Ask them about their hobbies. Ask their opinions on books they have read, to find out why they enjoyed or did not enjoy them. The time that you take to invest into really KNOWING your students will pay off tenfold in the long run.

Who Am I As a Reader?

Through professional learning channels, I discovered a fantastic platform to capture a student's readers identity through gamification. Bookelicious is a user-friendly platform that allows students to build their "bookmoji" (a self-identified reading avatar) and provides a window into their interests. As a mom, I was able to predict my son's bookmoji. As a school librarian with over 500 students, a bookmoji allowed me to ascertain each student's readers' identity at a quick glance and direct them towards THEIR "just right book." By knowing my kids as people I was able to help them on their journey to become super readers!!



About Jill:

Jill has worked as a Library Media Specialist since the 2005-2006 school year, both in Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC. She has served on the Maryland Black Eyed Susan Picture Book committee, The Washington DC Three Star Committee, and she has done work on September 11th curriculum through the 9/11 Tribute Center and the Pentagon.

Jill is the immediate past president of the DCASL chapter of ASL as well as the director of the SLS division of DCLA. She has also served on the leadership team for DCPS libraries, and the advisory board for Scholastic.

Jill and her husband, Josh have three children, two sons and one daughter (Hunter, age 9; Teddy, age 8; and Mikayla, age 6.) They live in Anne Arundel County, Maryland.

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