

Family Literacy Night

by LYNSEY BURKINS



*“Mrs. Burkins! Mrs. Burkins! Last night was magical.
My mom loved our family reading night.”*
—Brayden, age 8

Holding a family literacy night can provide a meaningful experience for students as well as their families. It is a unique way to bring families into the reading lives of their children. One key to success is to get students involved in the planning for the event, as well as the execution. That participation and buy-in means the students have ownership of the event and creates a rich and satisfying experience. What follows is a description of a virtual family literacy night, planned and executed with my third-grade class.

Background

Hopewell Elementary is located in a suburb outside of Columbus, Ohio. The school opened in the fall of 2020 to over 600 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Hopewell Elementary is unique in that it opened during a pandemic year, with students that came from four other elementary schools. The staff and students were challenged by the need to build a community when distance learning was a requirement. The school prides itself on strong parent and community partnerships. According to the student social emotional data collected in 2021, students feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance is one of Hopewell Elementary’s greatest accomplishments since its inception.



Meet Classroom 205

Classroom 205 is located on the second floor of Hopewell Elementary and has 18 third grade students. There are 13 students who use the he/him pronouns, and five students who use the she/her pronouns. Seven students identify with having more than one language that is

regularly spoken at home. Six students have identified with being born in countries other than the United States of America.

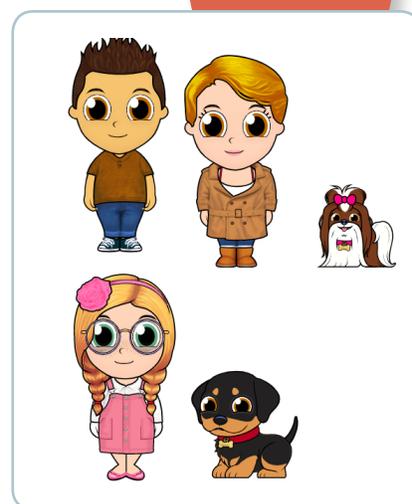
The class members have chosen to see themselves as a “family community.” This choice came about during Week Five of the school year, when a new student arrived to our class. During their morning talking circles, students were talking about how to greet a new student. One student said, “We can say ‘welcome to the family.’” From that moment on, the students referred to our class as a family.

Classroom 205’s Reading Journey

The readers in classroom 205 have spent the school year thus far getting to know themselves as readers by studying books they like to read, authors who they enjoy, places they like to read, ways that books make them feel, and stories they love hearing. This exploration of identity has allowed students to get to know themselves and each other as readers in one community. It has allowed students to bring their family reading histories in, and to listen to the histories of fellow students.

I introduced students to a reading/book website called Bookelicious—to get to know books that match our unique identities and help us to keep track of books and stories we really enjoy. Students learned that this website could help them make lists of books they want to read, and also get ideas of books that might speak to their hearts. One feature on the Bookelicious website is the ability to create Bookmojis, which are avatars that we design for ourselves and reflect our unique likes and interests. It turned out that this website was instrumental in the idea of hosting a virtual family reading night.

**Bookelicious
Bookmojis**



Classroom 205’s Virtual Family Reading Night

In mid-September parents in room 205 attended a virtual curriculum night. This night was designed for parents to have time to get to know the teacher, curriculum, and flow of the school year. I took this time to introduce parents to the organization Bring Me a Book as their classroom sponsor, and to Bookelicious as the vehicle in which students would engage with book selection and reading identity work. Multiple parents cheered when they learned about Bring Me a Book sponsoring the classroom for the year. I shared what the partnership will look like: Students will help plan three family reading nights, students will get to pick out six books for their home libraries, and students will get to help facilitate book conversations with their families. One parent said, “Wow this seems like a dream.”

The first family night was scheduled in October. The students used their talking circle time in the morning to think about ideas and plan for the event. Many students said things like, “My mom works at night,” “I don’t know if my family can come after school,” “Can it be before school?” “My family can’t come before school,” and so on. Students expressed

interest in finding a way to involve all families. One student suggested that maybe we ask our families for a good time then try to find one time.

Together the class and I crafted an email that went home to families asking for their opinions on times. From the responses, we discovered that there would be no way at this time that everyone would be included. Families were worried about specific times of days to meet and also meeting during the pandemic. One student suggested that we could do it on google meet. That led to my suggesting that we have a virtual family night, in which each family could decide what time worked best for them. The students agreed with the plan.

Getting organized...

We knew that, in order to have a successful reading night, students would have to be excited and invested in running the family night at home. So I conducted a series of mini-lessons during our reading workshop to help prepare students for their roles in the virtual family reading night. The focus of the first night was for students to teach their parents how to make a bookmoji, a personal reading avatar, on Bookelicious. This was something that brought each student so much joy. Students had to think about:

- How to ask their family when a good time was to do the virtual family night?
- What was a good place in their home to do it?
- Do they need to borrow a Chromebook™?

After students thought about the logistics, then they had to think about practicing their expertise on Bookelicious.

They thought about:

- Do I remember how to log in and find where to build the bookmoji?
- Can I show my family how to find different parts to add to the bookmoji?
- What will I point out to my family for them to notice?
- Can I show my family how to add books to the wishlist?

Family Literacy Night at Home

Goals for tonight:

1. Enjoy the time as a family.
2. Parents sign up for a Bookelicious Parent Account and create a Bookmoji.
3. Add two books to the wishlist that as a family you would like to have in your home!

1. Watch the introduction video!

2. Sign up for a parent account and create a Bookmoji!
<https://www.bookelicious.com/>

3. Pick out 2 books to add to your wishlist!

Family Literacy Night: 3 Steps to Success!

Click to watch the video!

Once students practiced with partners, they had to think about how they would share their reading identities with their family members, in order to add books to their wishlist as a family. They considered issues such as:

- What books do I like?
- What stories might my family like?
- What am I excited about reading right now?

Students spent time practicing so that they felt prepared to host their own family reading night. As a classroom family they picked a week in which everyone would try to host their reading night.

Results!

As students began to host their family events, they would come to school and say things like:

- “Hey guys, have you done yours yet? Look at my dad’s bookmoji!”
- “My sister wants to do this in her class. She made two bookmojis!”
- “I love the books we picked out...look!”
- “I can’t wait to get our books and read them together. My brother helped, too!”

Sixteen out of 18 families have experienced the virtual family reading night. The next reading night will not be a virtual one; it will take place at the community library. Each family will receive a copy of, *Our Favorite Day of the Year* by A. E. Ali and Rahele Jomepour Bell, one month prior to the family night. Students will create reflection questions to use with their families while reading the book at home. During the Family Reading Night at the library families will get a chance to share their experiences with the book and participate in a shared art experience. Librarians will be on hand to talk about the benefits of library cards, and to assist with signing families up for their library card. The goal is to gather families around a shared text and engage in a shared family reading experience as a Classroom 205 reading family.

About Lynsey Burkins:

Lynsey Burkins has been a passionate educator for over 18 years in Dublin, Ohio. Lynsey is a graduate of Bowling Green State University and received her MA from The Ohio State University. She is a member of NCTE and is Chair of the Build Your Stack Committee. Lynsey loves to share her practice and write about ways literature and transformational literacy practices can transform lives each and everyday! Lynsey also writes for the Teacher Books Readers blog. She lives for the moments when children see themselves in books and recognize that their stories matter too.