

Kevin Jaworski

Springfield Collegiate Institute

Oakbank, Manitoba, Canada



As far as I can remember, I was not overly fond of my high school English class experiences. This is not to say that my teachers were inherently inadequate or didn't have good ideas. Moreover, it was the lack of choice when it came to our required texts to read is what stands out in my memory. At the time, I did not enjoy the texts that were imposed upon me, which in turn, did not motivate me to produce anything authentic or critical within my assignments.

Moving into my twelfth year of teaching at Springfield Collegiate Institute, found in the lovely town of Oakbank,

Manitoba, Canada, I continually strive to make **choice** the foundation of my teaching craft. This can be found when I start each year off with the adopted idea of the "Book Speed Dating" activity to immerse students in books right away to show that they can make choices and that reading is foundational within our classroom.

Dedicating ten to fifteen minutes at the start of each class for silent, sustained choice novel reading allows the students to really sink their teeth into the world that their book provides. Scheduled and non-scheduled conferences with my students to chat about what they are reading has become increasingly important when building healthy, working relationships with my students, as well as fostering an environment where talking about books is the norm.

Finally, when I introduced book clubs into my classroom a few years ago, students were able to see that when choosing the right book for them, they can both annotate their text authentically, but also bounce ideas, thoughts, concerns, important quotes, and confusion with their fellow classmates. The power of choice allows my students to **actually** talk about their books versus answering stale comprehension questions. As Benjamin, my former student eloquently put it:

"Being able to discuss, debate, and consider opinions and perspectives added even more depth to the ideas I formed through reading the novel myself. It was fresh and compelling, far from any prior book club experience I've had. And, it was fun, which is a word rarely used to describe a high school course, but I distinctly remember myself looking forward to these meetings, to get a chance to share all the profound meaning I had discovered in a novel."

Being a recipient of The Book Love Foundation Grant will allow me to continue to grow my classroom library and book club sets so that my students can have more access to relevant and timely texts that they can see themselves in, as well as develop empathy and understanding of unfamiliar worlds to them.

