

How to Talk to Your Child about Books

An article in "Unwrapping the Gifted," a blog on the Education Week Teacher site addresses an interesting slant on engaging children in reading. While reading for the sheer enjoyment of being entertained and escaping into a wonderful imaginative world is a perfectly legitimate reason to read, books can also provide a neutral ground to help parents and children discuss topics that might otherwise be difficult. The concept of bibliotherapy is not new, but it is worth taking another look at it if you haven't ever talked with your child about the ups and downs of life using the medium of either fictional or biographical works.

"Hopefully we've all had that experience of reading a book that powerfully "spoke" to us, a book whose characters we could relate to, and whose struggles and triumphs we identified with. Taking this experience a step farther is the strategy of bibliotherapy, the process of helping the reader learn about and cope with any social or emotional struggles or developmental needs by identifying with a character in a book who shares a similar struggle or need. The reading is typically followed up by discussion with a trusted adult."

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/unwrapping_the_gifted/2009/03/using_bibliotherapy_with_gifted_children.html

As a parent, presumably you are in the best position to be that trusted adult. When your child faces difficulties (a fuss with a friend, moving to a new school, losing a pet, worrying about tests, dealing with an illness, etc.), it is often difficult to talk about the problem directly. Discussing a book whose characters face a similar dilemma, however, can often be an excellent way to talk about challenges from a somewhat objective position. Positive subjects can also be discussed by reading about famous historical characters, current famous people, or fictional works about growing up. Instead of asking a child what he/she wants to be when he/she grows up, read about real people who dreamed of accomplishing something, and how they accomplished that goal.

When talking with a child about a book, ask questions that require longer, more thoughtful answers:

- What character in the book did you like the most? How is this character like you?
- Are the problems/challenges in the book like problems you have? How did the character in the book solve the problem? Do you think the solution was a good idea? Why or why not?
- Do you think the main character(s) made good decisions? Give an example. Would you have done the same thing?
- Do you think the main character(s) ever made bad decisions? Give an example. What should the character have done differently?
- Did the characters in the book use intelligence and thoughtfulness to solve problems? Do any of their solutions to problems help you think about how to solve your problems?
- What do you think the author wanted you to learn from this book? Did he/she do a good job of sending this "message" to you?

While there are thousands of good children's books, a few sites listed at the end of the article that offer particularly helpful booklists are:

1. <http://www.bertiekingore.com/gtchildreninlit.htm>
2. <http://isd742.org/teachingandlearning/MRW/mrwbooksforgifted.htm>
3. <http://gtworld.org/gtbook.htm>