Branch Out & Read

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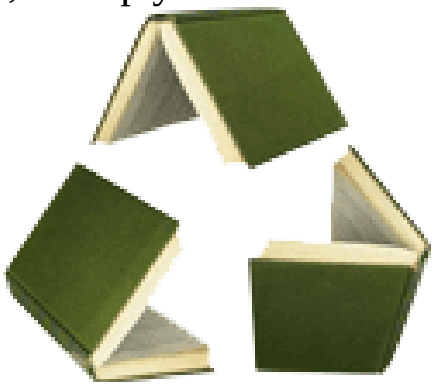
Goals

The main objective of ***Branch Out & Read*** is to promote reading. (Common Core Standards: RL.K.10/ RL.1.10 /RL.2.10/ RL.3.10 /RL.4.10 /RL.5.10) Offering the opportunity to exchange books increases the chances children will read books that interest them. They enjoy the whole process because they get to chose from a wide variety of books. The children are excited to take part in a big reading treasure hunt.

Additionally, ***Branch Out & Read*** helps parents and guardians save money. While it is nice to save some favorite and special books, trading shelved books helps parents and guardians save time and space. They were more excited than the kids when I announced the book exchange and some volunteered to help. It is similar to the feeling you get when your supermarket offers "*buy one get one free*" promotions on a family staple.

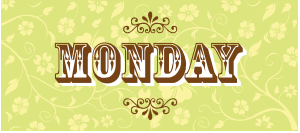
Furthermore, ***Branch Out & Read*** helps to reduce and reuse. It is a very GREEN activity. Books that were sitting on a shelf are being REUSED and garbage is REDUCED. It is a win, win situation for all. If you are ready, roll up your sleeves and let us get started!



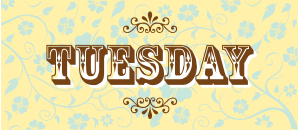
Time

As with most things in life, the timing of ***Branch Out & Read*** is of utmost importance. Select a date with your principal/administrator. I highly recommend a regular five day school week, instead of a short week or a week where there are other important activities going on.

Ideally, it should be a week long endeavor. Children bring books they want to trade Monday through Thursday and the exchange takes place on Friday.



Collect books



Collect books

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BOOK EXCHANGE

You will need to figure out the logistics according to your school population at each grade level. You do not want your book exchange to compete with a Halloween parade, a Thanksgiving feast or a Hispanic Heritage celebration.

Some possible scenarios for Monday through Thursday drop off could be hourly or in time blocks:

HOURLY

- 1st Graders 8:30
- 2nd graders 9:30
- 3rd graders 10:30

TIME BLOCKS

- Primary grades before lunch/ Secondary grades after lunch
- An open drop off, any grade at any time during the school day.

Keep Tally

In order to have a more effective book exchange , the volunteers receiving the books should keep tally by grade level. You will need this information to better distribute time on the actual exchange date and in order to keep track of how many books were traded. I suggest a clipboard and a pencil.

Venue

I have hosted several ***Branch Out & Read*** book exchanges at Blue Lakes Elementary School in the corridor by my classroom. We spent the week (Monday-Thursday) collecting books which I kept in my room and then displayed on Friday outside my classroom in the corridor. Since Blue Lakes is an open school rain was an important factor. Fortunately, the book exchanges I have hosted were all during dry weather. Your school site determines where you host your book exchange. I can only tell you what has worked for me; you will need to figure out your own logistics. Talk to your principal, talk to your media specialist. You may be able to do it in the library, a vacant office or in the cafeteria. Again, it all depends on your school.

Materials

Branch Out & Read does not require a lot of materials. Basically you are getting a book and giving a book; but you will need tickets, copy paper, a clip board, a pencil and art supplies (to make advertisements). It is also important to have extra books. While in theory you are getting as many books as you are giving, not all the books brought in to trade will appeal to all the kids and some may be damaged. Another issue is that you will wind up with more lower grade books and have a higher demand of chapter books and higher grade level books. It only makes sense, as children read more they need more challenging books so there are less of those available.

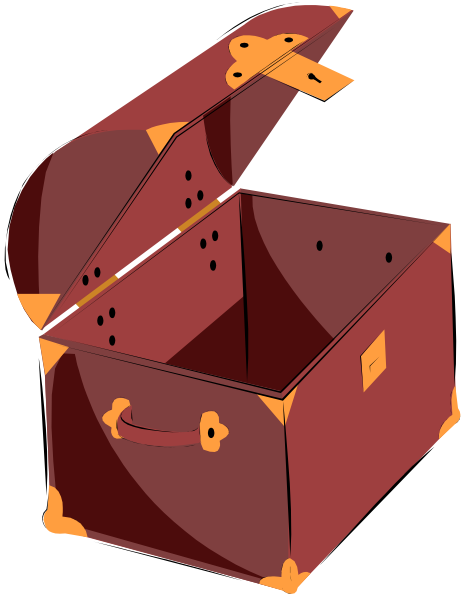
Advertising

You will need to let EVERYBODY know about the book exchange.

- The principal will need to approve your activity.
- The Media Specialist may have books he/she wishes to donate.
- The art teacher may help with creating signs to post around the school.
- The music teacher may encourage kids to create a rap song or a jingle.
- Other teachers will need to be aware and remind their students to bring in books to trade. Some may even write it as a homework assignment.
- Parents will need to assist children with selecting books to trade and some may also have books they wish to donate.
- Custodians will need to assist you with setting up tables or carts for the display on trading day.
- Your students will be able to assist with the trading, setting up and cleaning up.
- The person in charge of morning announcement will remind the kids of the activity.

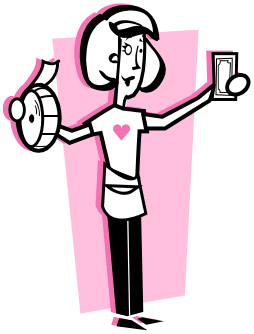
Storage

As previously mentioned, you will collect books all week. You will therefore need a place to store them. (I have a chest under my computer table.) Any place where they are safe is fine. Remember, this is only for 1 week, after the exchange MOST books will be gone. It is a good idea to have empty boxes or carts, but you can store these TEMPORARILY just about any place.



Volunteers

You will need a LOT of help but you can get a lot of support. Approach your principal first, as it is crucial to get him/her on your team. Why wouldn't your principal want this? It is great for the kids, the parents and the environment. Once the principal is onboard, reach out to your fellow teachers for additional support. The media specialist is extremely important, especially if you want to use the media center as the venue to host the event. The media specialist at my school was great and advised me of possible schedule conflicts with book fairs and such so that it would not interfere with the exchange. Your media specialist may also be able to donate books. He/she may have books that need to be discarded but are in good condition. However, my greatest helpers were my own students. They were delighted that WE were hosting a book exchange and they were very eager to assist. I created a schedule for drop off and they all took turns in receiving books and issuing tickets. I basically had one student at a time, sitting by the door with tickets. When a book was brought in he/she would issue a ticket to the person who brought it and then store the book. It is a good idea to keep count of how many books were brought in by each grade level.



The Set Up

On Friday you will need to set up. Your display will depend on your venue. Envision it before you start. Where will the books look best? How would you like to display them? One time I thought it best to use some cafeteria benches and had the custodians bring me a couple. I placed them against the wall and set up the books on them for display. Another time I used rolling carts. Use whatever will suit your needs.

You should consider who will come first and display age appropriate books at that time. I learned through trial and error to call the oldest students first because they should have first pick at the chapter and older grade level books. When I did it inversely the little kids were getting chapter books. (The media specialist told me this happens all the time- kids take books that are out of their league to feel more mature.)

The Exchange

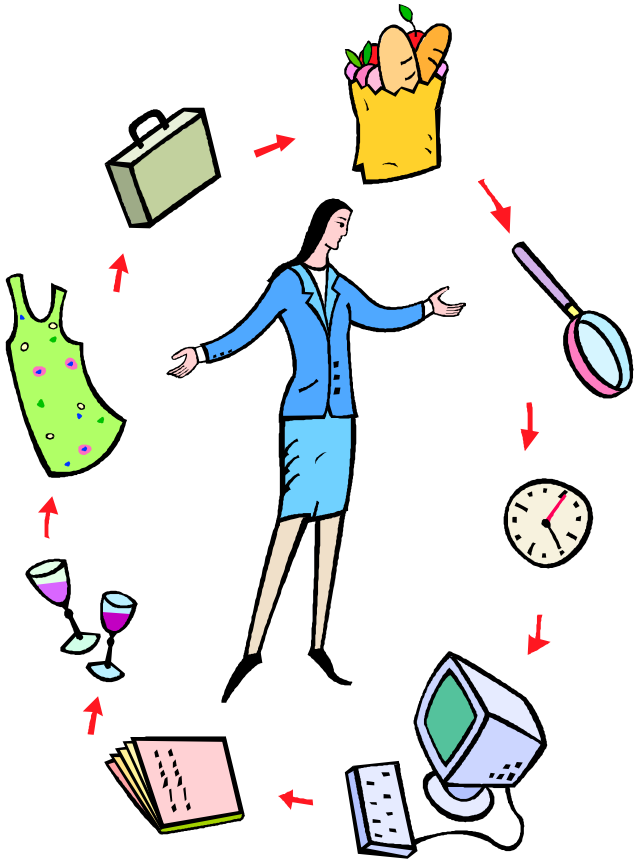
* The date has been set.
* The word has been spread.
* The advertisement done.
* The books have been brought in.
* The venue has been established.
* The books have been displayed.
* IT’S SHOW TIME!!!!!

The book exchange itself is a joy! The children arrive with tickets in hand and begin rummaging through the available books to see what they like. Do not stress over the mess, in looking for the books they like, the kids will totally mess up your nice display. Be grateful you do not work stocking counters at stores! The search is half the fun. The little and not so little faces of joy as they find a book they like will compensate your work tenfold.

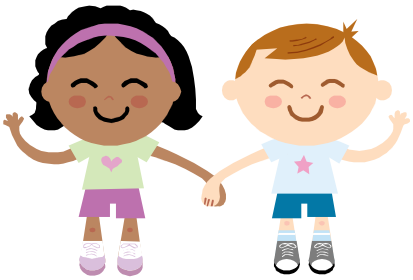
Problems/ Solutions

Over the years I have encountered the following problems and offer these tips:

- **Problem**: Parents complained about not enough time to find the books they wanted to trade.
- **Solution**: Give ample time. I suggest 10 days, from the moment you announce the exchange to the day you actually start collecting. This will allow working parents a chance to look through their home libraries with their children and select which books can be traded.



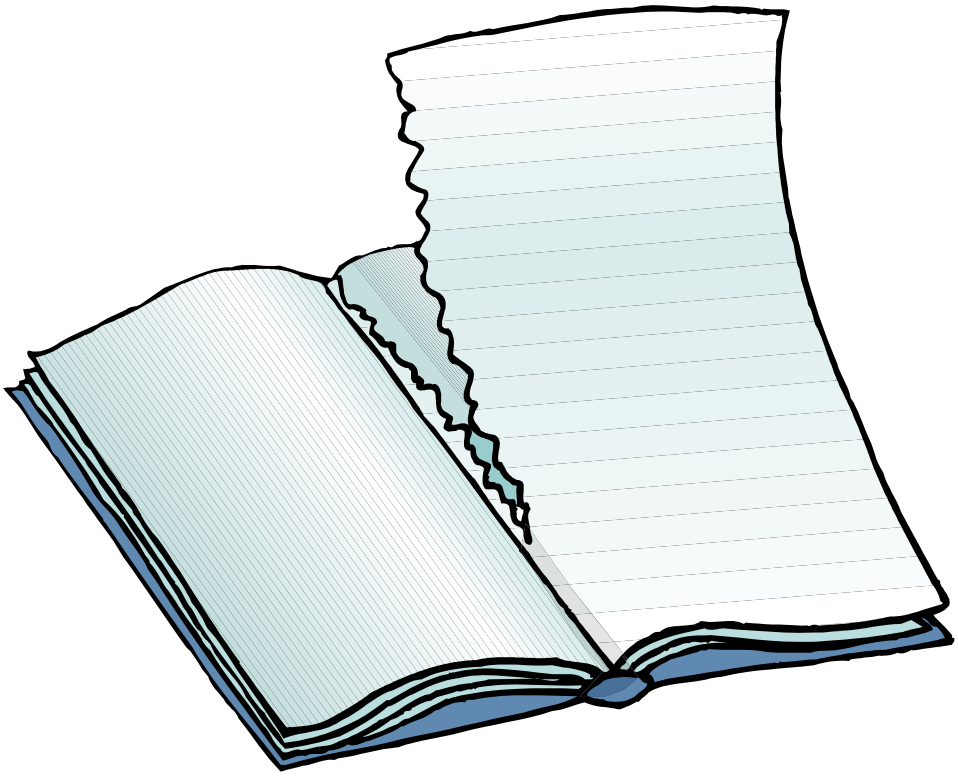
- **Problem**: Younger students took most of the chapter books and left few for the older students.
- **Solution**: Call older students first. We are an elementary school so I start with fifth graders and I try to get donations and purchase chapter books.



- **Problem**: Some kids could not find books they liked.
- **Solution**: Try to obtain a grant to purchase a variety of books, I wrote a mini grant and got $300 to purchase books and tickets. I bought used books at thrift stores and garage sales. $300 does not go very far in book stores.

- **Problem**: A few children brought books that were not theirs to trade; some from the school library and even from the public library.
- **Solution**: Warn your assistants to check that the books do not belong to a library; if in doubt they should ask you. Try to find out if it is an honest mistake, if in doubt refer to the counselor; this is stealing.

- **Problem**: Some students brought books that were damaged, torn or written on.
- **Solution**: I took this problem with a grain of salt depending on the condition of the book (Could it still be read? I allowed the trade), remember this is totally a NON-FOR-PROFIT activity; the idea is to rotate books and keep kids reading and enthusiastic about reading.



- **Problem:** Some colleagues wanted to trade books as well.
- **Solution**: I allowed them to trade after I was done with the exchange. Remember the goal is to exchange books.

- **Problem:** Some kids that were not students at the school (cousins or siblings of students) wanted to trade.
- **Solution**: I allowed them to trade after I was done with the exchange. Remember the goal is to exchange books.

- **Problem:** I ran out of time; the bell rang and I still had children rummaging through books.
- **Solution**: Allow ample time for trading; I suggest 1 hour per grade. It is BETTER to have too much time than not enough.

- **Problem:** Some “entitled” parents wanted to exchange books on their schedule not mine.
- **Solution:** Stand your ground, stick to your schedule.

- **Problem:** Some students were absent on the trading date and still have their tickets.
- **Solution:** Assign a make-up time (at your convenience) when the students that were absent or missed the exchange for what ever reason can come in and look at what is left. If they do not like any of the books they can donate the remaining books to the future book exchange.

In Conclusion

Branch Out & Read is a very worth while activity but requires logistical planning and support:

1) Talk to your principal
2) Obtain a grant and/or book donations
3) Enlist the help of your staff, parents and students
4) Set a date
5) Do it.

Although Blue Lakes is a very small school (+/- 500 students) during last year's ***Branch Out & Read*** the students exchanged over 850 books. So I give you over 850 reasons to do this!!!!!!!!!!!!