

Professional Development

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Keynote #1: Anne Blankman

I attended the first keynote session with Anne Blankman. She is currently an author, lives in Richmond, Virginia, and has been a youth services librarian. I chose the session because I was intrigued to hear from a female author and former librarian, and I was curious to hear from a keynote speaker.

Anne shared her journey of writing a young adult novel while her husband was under treatment for cancer. To care for her young daughter, she would read a variety of books with her. The books would range from *Big Nate* to ?? She spoke of the value of sharing books with her daughter to deal with the grief and sadness of their current circumstance.

Her most current novel for grades 3 to 6, *The Blackbird Girls*, looks very interesting. The book details the story of the close friendship of two girls as they escape to safety during the Chernobyl disaster. I can foresee adding the book to a school library collection. I think this book would also be intriguing as a book talk. I would also consider inviting the author in for an author visit to highlight the value of friendship amidst difficult circumstances.

Anne Blankman's keynote session reminds me of the power of telling good stories that come from a place of personal meaning. *The Blackbird Girls* is based on her own friendship with a girl whose parents experienced the Chernobyl disaster. Sharing authentic and real experiences in a captivating story can be powerful and inspiring. When she shared the value of friendship during difficult times, I am reminded of how to encourage our students to reflect on their own life experiences, and to share what they are learning about themselves. On the surface, the story is about a very difficult and upsetting experience, but the author takes the narrative to a much more meaningful place by highlighting a higher level of universal values of caring for one another, even when the other person is different from you.

Reference

Blankman, A. (2022). Anne Blankman. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from <http://www.anneblankman.com/>

Session #1: “Embracing brown and black books”

I viewed the online recording of the session, “Embracing brown and black books” which was co-presented by Tanisha Tyler, a Media Specialist at Gildersleeve Middle School with Newport News Public Schools, and Tiffany Cannon, a Media Specialist at Ward Hill High School with Williamsburg-James City Schools. I chose this session because the Library/Media Specialist that I work with expressed interest in learning more about book recommendations.

In this recorded session, the two presenters make a clear case for an active embracing of book selection representing brown and black characters. I would apply this information to library lessons by modeling curiosity when talking with administrators, staff and students about books that they are reading outside of their everyday life experience, embracing the trailblazing roles of libraries against racism by selecting fiction and non-fiction books that include brown and black characters, and embracing advocacy for the value and impact of school libraries. The presenters shared the ALA advocacy materials and NCAC educators’ handbook websites, as well as suggested books representing the brown and black experience. A key piece discussed in a blog by Alexandria Brown was avoiding labeling books as diverse so as to reinforce white supremacy (Brown, 2022). Finally, the information is extremely helpful in remaining aware of the challenges around censorship and highlighted efforts like the Freedom Fighters Twitter account (#Freadom, 2021).

References

Cannon, T. and T. Tyler. (2021, April 25). *Embracing brown and black books* [PowerPoint slides].

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<https://vaaslspringconference2022.sched.com/event/z0zJ/embracing-brown-and-black-books>

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Brown, A. (2022, February 3). *How labeling books as "diverse" reinforces white supremacy*. Lee & Low

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<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2020/08/26/how-labeling-books-as-diverse-reinforces-white-supremacy/>

Session #2: “Virginia Reader’s Choice”

The second online session that I viewed was “Virginia Reader’s Choice”. The presenters were Tamara Teaff, retired librarian at Eagle Rock Elementary School with Botetourt County Schools, and Jane Field, retired librarian with Wasena Elementary School with Roanoke City Schools. I selected the session because like the first session, the librarian that I work with was interested in book recommendations.

I was only faintly aware of the Virginia Reader’s Choice books so I was intrigued to learn more about the program. The co-presenters shared rich, detailed information about a large range of books for the primary and elementary school levels. The second presenter provided the Youtube weblinks for the book read aloud. I can imagine referring to the Virginia Reader’s Choice lists over the past five years when making book selections, and using the online book read aloud during storytimes with students. Learning about popular titles with students was very interesting and brought books to my attention that I might not otherwise have thought of.

References

Field, J. and T. Teaff. (2021, March 12). *Virginia Reader’s Choice Primary & Elementary Level*

Books 2022-23 [PowerPoint slides]. VAASL Spring Regional Conference.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHqMOuLjSc0>.

Virginia State Literacy Association. (2022). *Virginia readers choice 2022-23*. LiveBinders. Retrieved

April 25, 2022, from <https://www.livebinders.com/edit?id=2986569>

Session #3: “Wishers and dreamers”

The third online session that I viewed was called, “Wishers and Dreamers”, and it was presented by Lynne Stover, a teacher consultant with James Madison University’s Center for Economic Education. I selected this session because it is another resource for gathering book recommendations.

The presenter covered less books than the other sessions discussed but provided a more thorough analysis and detailed activities for students. Many of the books featured diverse topics and characters that were Persons of Color. This session provides several 30-40 minute library lessons to choose from with a book read aloud, class discussion, and follow up activity. I would consider using several of these books for an elementary-level library lesson. Also, for a high school library lesson, the presenter suggested using picture books to teach economics or to discuss issues for families trying to manage immigration decisions. I would consider several of the picture books for a self-contained Economics class or English class. The picture books would work well with several of the low readers who are English Learners, and the topic of immigration is current topic that all of the students could either relate to or would be able to participate in a discussion.

References

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<https://www.readingmakescents.com/>

Stover, L. A. (2021, April 25). *Wishers and Dreamers: Children’s Books featuring the Immigrant Experience* [PowerPoint slides]. VAASL Spring Regional Conference.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_e0eoSdC1A