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# A book club for children with autism spectrum disorder

Elizabeth Ann Kosmicki  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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A BOOK CLUB FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

A BOOK CLUB FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
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University Honors with Distinction

Elizabeth Ann Kosmicki  
University of Northern Iowa  
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Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Jennifer Garrett, CCC-SLP, Honors Thesis Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

# A BOOK CLUB FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

## **Abstract**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties with social communication and interaction, as well as repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities. Individuals with ASD are also known to struggle with reading comprehension. Difficulties in social communication and interaction may lead to depression, while poor literacy skills may result in unemployment and poverty. Because book clubs target social communication and interaction, as well as reading comprehension, they may be beneficial for individuals with ASD. Indeed, some evidence already exists to support this belief. Through literature review of book clubs in general, currently existing book clubs and information on starting them for individuals with ASD, and adaptations to support individuals with ASD in reading comprehension and social communication and interaction, this paper addresses the question, “How does one create and facilitate a book club for children with ASD?” The answers drawn then take the form of a freely available work book for anyone interested in starting a book club for children grades three through four with ASD.

## Introduction

According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder “characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction...[and] the presence of restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 50). Problems with social communication and interaction can result in bullying and a lack of friendships, which in turn may contribute to the high rate of depression for individuals with ASD<sup>1</sup>, largely in adolescence (Cappadocia, Weiss, & Pepler, 2012; Hawker & Boulton, 2000; Whitehouse, Durkin, Jaquet, and Ziatas, 2009; Simonoff, Pickles, Charman, Chandler, Loucas, & Baird, 2008; as cited in De-La-Inglesia & Olivar, 2015). In addition to the characteristics of ASD listed in the definition above, individuals with ASD often have difficulty with literacy, or reading and writing (Chiang & Lin, 2007; Nation, Clarke, Wright, & Williams 2006, as cited in Carnahan, Williamson, Christman, 2011; “Reading and Writing: Literacy,” n.d.). Success in literacy can directly impact one’s job outlook. Poor literacy skills are connected with poverty and unemployment, while greater-than-average proficiency is a requirement of the twenty-five fastest growing professions (Wagner, 2000; Barton, 2004, as cited in National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2008).

Because communication and literacy are fundamental components of book clubs, such a program targeted toward individuals with autism spectrum disorder could provide

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the term ASD individuals is preferred by some instead of individuals with ASD (Brown, 2011).

an excellent environment to develop those skills (McLellan, 2012). In fact, studies conducted by Virginia J. Goatley, an assistant professor at the University at Albany, State University of New York, on participation of children with special needs in book clubs showed improvement in the children's literacy and social communication and interaction skills (1997). Moreover, by specifically creating a club for third and fourth grade children with ASD, improvement in these areas could then lead to a reduced chance of depression when they reach adolescence and an increased job outlook as adults. This thesis will explore and answer the question, "How does one create and facilitate a book club for children with ASD?" The conclusions drawn will then result in a free workbook for anyone interested in starting a book club for children on the autism spectrum. Though several book clubs and sources for programming such a book club for individuals with ASD exist, there is so much variation in programming in addition to depth and accessibility of information that such a packet would be extremely useful.

## **Literature Review**

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

A study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that among eight year olds in the year 2010, 1 in 68 have Autism Spectrum Disorder (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014, as cited in "Autism," n.d.). In addition, males are four times more likely than females to be diagnosed with ASD. Though no one cause for ASD exists, the disorder is most likely due to a mixture of environmental factors (such as exposure to toxins as a fetus) and genetics (APA, 2013).

According to the DSM-5, in order to be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, an individual must fulfill five qualifications. First, they must struggle with social

communication and interaction. This includes problems with social-emotional reciprocity, or engaging in a give-and-take when interacting with others, nonverbal communication, either by not understanding or using nonverbals, and with relationships, whether making, keeping, or understanding them. Second, they must have at least two types of “restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities:” repetition in how they move their bodies, use objects, or speak; difficulty with change; narrow, in-depth interests; and/or an under- or overreaction to sensory input (APA, 2013, p. 50). Third, they must fulfill these first two qualifications before entering elementary school (since ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder). Fourth, the first two qualifications must significantly impair how they function in their life. Fifth and finally, the first two qualifications can not be explained by an intellectual disability (also known as an intellectual developmental disorder), defined as problems with thinking and adapting, or global development delay, which is when a child is unable to participate in the assessment for an intellectual disability. However, even though two people share a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder the disorder will not necessarily manifest in the same way. According to the APA, “Manifestations of the disorder ... vary greatly depending on the severity of the autism condition, developmental level, and chronological age; hence, the term *spectrum*” (APA, 2013, 53).

Around 70% of individuals with ASD have an additional mental disorder, and 40% have two or more. Comorbid disorders include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, intellectual disability, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and developmental coordination disorder. They may also have problems with language and self-injurious and/or disruptive behaviors (APA, 2013).

As stated earlier, individuals with ASD may experience difficulty with literacy – specifically reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is the ability to decode written words and understand what those words *mean* (Carnahan et al., 2011). Some individuals with ASD have hyperlexia, meaning they excel at decoding; therefore, their struggle lies with the second half of the equation (Stone, Silliman, Ehren, Wallach, 2014; Nguyen, Leytham, Whiby, Gelfer, 2015).

There are three main theories to explain this problem with comprehension. The first is that individuals with ASD struggle with theory of mind, or the ability to understand that all people think and feel differently and that these mental processes influence their actions (Frith C. & Frith U., 2006, as cited in Carnahan et al., 2011). Without theory of mind, interpreting what characters in books feel becomes difficult. (Carnahan & Williamson, 2010; Colle, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, & van der Lely, 2008; Williamson, Carnahan, & Jacobs, 2009, as cited in Carnahan et al., 2011). The second is that they struggle with executive function, or the brain's ability to organize, plan, and self-monitor (Attwood, 2008, as cited in Carnahan et al., 2011). Without executive function, an individual with ASD will not think to stop and figure out areas of a text they do not understand (Carnahan et al., 2011). Difficulties also arise when making connections with the text based on personal knowledge and explaining the correct sequence of events in a story (Nguyen et al., 2015). The final theory is that individuals with ASD have weak central coherence, or the ability to focus on the big picture (Happé & Frith, 2006; Koegel, Koegel, & Carter, 1999; Quill, 2000 as cited in Carnahan, et al., 2011). Instead, they focus on the little details, and this makes it hard to draw the main meaning from the text (Happé, 2005; Williamson, Carnahan, & Jacobs, 2009 as cited in



Carnahan, et al., 2011). This can also mean they are unable to understand certain words by drawing from the surrounding context, instead, they need the definition explicitly provided (Martin & McDonald, 2003, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008). They struggle with figures of speech such as idioms and understand nonfiction more easily (Attwood, 2008 as cited in Carnahan, et al., 2011, Myles, et al., 2002 as cited in Stysliger, 2012).

However, these three theories do not completely explain an individual with ASD's difficulties with reading comprehension (Carnahan et al., 2011). They also experience difficulties with homographs (vocabulary with multiple meanings), words composed of similar sounds and letters, and pronouns (having trouble understanding to whom the pronoun refers when listening or reading; Tager-Flusberg, Paul, & Lord, 2005; O'Connor & Klein, 2004, as cited in Carnahan et al., 2011). Overall, reading comprehension may be an area that should specifically be addressed when meeting the needs of individuals with ASD.

### **Book Clubs**

There is much disagreement over what exactly defines a book club. Some say it is different from a literature circle, while others say they are the same. Some say the members run the discussion and choose the book, while others say there is a set leader, such as a teacher (O'Donnell-Allen, 2006; McLellan, 2012). It might be able to take place in a classroom, a restaurant, a library, a member's home, or even outside. The club might meet once a month, and there might be snacks, crafts, fieldtrips, or author visits (Littlejohn, 2011; John, 2006). Members may be as young as kindergarteners (Littlejohn, 2011). The only nonnegotiable aspect of a book club is that the members must read and discuss some form of literature.

Book clubs have been shown to benefit typically developing<sup>2</sup> students. By taking part in book clubs, students increase their ability to read with a purpose and analyze how they think, as well as their social skills (Gilles, 1990; Berne & Clark, 2008; Lloyd, 2004; Sportsman, Certo, Bolt, & Miller, 2011, as cited in McLellan, 2012). This improvement can be explained using Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which says literacy is enhanced through interacting with others, and reader response theory, which says we acquire meaning when we combine the information in the text with our own personal knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978; Rosenblatt, 1976, as cited in McLellan, 2012). Gathering in a group to discuss books means there is social interaction *and* members gain understanding not only through their own personal knowledge in combination with the text, but from the personal knowledge of others (Mills & Jennings, 2011, as cited in McLellan, 2012). Book clubs therefore appear to be one possible way of addressing literacy and social skills.

### **Existing Book Clubs and Information on Them for Individuals with ASD**

Some book clubs and information for starting a book club for individuals with ASD already exist:

**TAG's Autism Book Club.** TAG (The Autism Gathering) is a group whose "mission is to invite [individuals with ASD] to abandon the medical model of autism as a diagnosis, and to discover, instead, autism as a way of life" ("About TAG," n.d.). They believe autism is not a disorder, but rather a normal variation of what it means to be human, and they encourage individuals with ASD to explore this concept through mentoring, writing workshops, and a book club ("What is autism?," n.d.; "Autism Book

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<sup>2</sup> Also known as neurotypical (Kluth, 2003)

Club,” n.d.; “About Carolyn,” n.d.). The Autism Book Club meets once a month at a local bookstore, and its participants include individuals with and without ASD (specifically professionals, students, and parents; “Autism Book Club,” n.d.). According to the bookstore’s website, each meeting is lead by two “local professionals in the autism field” (Malaprop’s Bookstore/Cafe, n.d.). They read a variety of different genres, connected only in that they are written by, for, and/or about individuals with ASD. They do not discuss or read about causes of ASD or treatments for it (“Autism Book Club,” n.d.).

**Book club at the University of Utah.** This book club is offered through the University of Utah’s Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinic and the Neurobehavior HOME Program, which serve individuals with ASD and developmental disorders respectively (“Therapy groups,” n.d.; “Autism spectrum disorder clinic,” n.d.; “Neurobehavior HOME program,” n.d.). It is a free, non-therapeutic social gathering (“Therapy Groups,” n.d.). The primary members are individuals with autism considered high-functioning and at least eighteen years old; however, the book club also welcomes friends and parents. The group meets once a month for two hours, with twenty to thirty people attending (The Utah Autism Resource Partnership [UTARP], n.d.; The Scope, 2014). They first eat pizza as a large group, then break off into two groups to discuss two different books, one of which is at a lower reading level. At the end they come together to vote on two books for the next meeting which can be proposed by any member; members with ASD get two votes, and those not on the spectrum get one. The club is not concerned whether members read the book or not, only that they can contribute to the conversation; therefore, they do not mind if their members only read the summary online or watch the movie version.

Members are encouraged to facilitate discussion, but they are not required to do so (UTARP, n.d.)

Dr. Megan Farley, a clinical psychologist at the University of Utah, originally founded the club. She created it because she felt there was a need for activities that adults with ASD could attend. Currently, Joseph Viskochil, a clinical psychology graduate teaching assistant at the university, runs the club (“Joseph Mills Viskochil,” n.d.; The Scope, 2014). Viskochil noticed many benefits the club members receive through participation. After a couple months of membership, members with ASD will begin to become more involved during the club and may meet with other members outside of meetings. Family member participants also benefit; the club serves as a type of support system, reminding them they are not alone in their experiences (The Scope, 2014).

The University of Utah’s book club also has a list of tips online for anyone interested in starting a book club. This sheet discusses their schedule, how to pick books, and facilitative strategies for running the meeting (chose a quiet location, offer food, prepare discussion questions ahead of time, make sure books are less than three hundred pages, moderate speaking time, etc.; UTARP, n.d.).

**Chapters book club.** This book club is held at the University of Massachusetts Lowell for individuals with ASD considered high-functioning and between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five years old. The group choses a book together which they read independently and as a whole. They also meet to discuss it over a series of seventy-five minute sessions held once a week for eight weeks. In addition, they must agree to fill out questionnaires and undergo physiological testing for research. Membership costs fifty dollars. Two professors, Dr. Ashleigh Hillier and Dr. Bridgett Marshall, with degrees in

psychology and English at the university run the meetings, and undergraduate and graduate students aid them (University of Massachusetts Lowell, n.d.).

**Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC).** Though the NCBC was created specifically for individuals diagnosed with intellectual disability (ID), it is open to anyone at any reading level. It was created in 2002 by a group composed of Dr. Tom Fish, director of the Family Support and Employment program at The Ohio State University Nisonger Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, as well as representatives from the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD), the Franklin County Board of MR/DD, Borders Books and Music, a graduate student, and two individuals with intellectual disabilities. Currently there are NCBCs in over 250 cities and six countries. The purpose of the club is to increase literacy, community inclusion, and self-determination in its members. Meetings last one hour. They are held at a public location, generally someplace that serves food; the idea behind this is to not only bring individuals with ID into the community, but to bring the community to individuals with ID. Two trained facilitators run each meeting, and each group receives a starter set of books but after that must find their own (Fish, Rabidoux, Ober, Graff, 2009). Training to start a NCBC is not free, but they do sell a book from which some ideas can be gleaned (Klipper, 2014). A 2007 questionnaire composed of sixty-three NCBC members reported a large majority of readers (80% and up) enjoyed the club, noticed improved reading ability, felt more comfortable in public places, and had more friends (Fish, et al., 2009).

**Book clubs created in part and studied by Virginia J. Goatley.** Goatley implemented a book club created by Susan McMahon, a reading education professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Taffy Raphael, a literacy education professor

at Michigan State University, which was composed of four main parts: reading the book, writing about the book (through reading logs and essays), participating in a class discussion, and participating in a small group discussion, or book club (Goatley, 1997; McMahon & Raphael, 1997). The club took place in a resource room with five children who had special needs and were in upper-elementary, and the themes covered were folktales and disabilities. The students struggled with how to participate in the group, and were unsure how to take turns, ask for clarification, and answer each other's questions. They also had a hard time understanding there could be multiple meanings drawn from the literature, understanding the book beyond its literal interpretation, and using other forms of media to interpret what they read. In addition to studying this self-contained group, Goatley also observed children with special needs who participated in the general classroom's book clubs. For both the children in the resource room and in the general classroom, Goatley noted improved elaboration in discussion and in writing and greater usage of personal experiences to understand the text (Goatley, 1997).

*Programming for Children and Teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder.* This is a book written by Barbara Klipper who is heavily involved in the ASD community. To name a few of her accomplishments, she is the co-founder of Giant Steps, a school for individuals with ASD in Connecticut, and developer of the Special Needs Collection for The Ferguson Library in Stamford, Connecticut. In the book, she provides information on ASD, general information on how to create a program for individuals with ASD (such as considerations regarding the environment and food), and specific examples of many types of different programs. These include book clubs for children in kindergarten through

second grade, children in third through eighth grade, and children with lower-functioning ASD (Klipper, 2014).

For the youngest group, Klipper suggests reading a picture book twice as a group, the first time looking only at the pictures (known as a picture walk), the second time reading the text. She also recommends doing a craft. For the third-eighth graders, she gives suggestions on types of books to read and concrete questions to ask. During a book discussion with children considered to be low-functioning, Klipper recommends having parents present to walk through a short story about animals, then having each child fill out a graphic organizer about the animals' attributes. She suggests taking a break to move around before finishing with a coloring activity. The meeting should be kept short (45 minutes long) and the number of group members small (five to eight members; Klipper, 2014).

*“A Land We Can Share:” Teaching Literacy to Students with Autism.* This book was written by Dr. Paula Kluth, a former special educator who now focuses on promoting inclusion for students with disabilities, and Dr. Kelly Chandler-Olcott (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). Chandler-Olcott was an associate professor at Syracuse University and director of the English Education program, and now is the associate dean of research (Syracuse University, n.d.; Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). In the book, the authors gave a list of suggested adaptations for a book club with members with ASD. They recommended allowing students to take turns choosing high-interest books and including books written by people with ASD. They also suggested introducing the club with a video of a book club, explicitly stating and providing examples of how you want students to interact, and inviting students to bring notes. For students who could not interact in the

same way as other members, Kluth and Chandler-Olcott recommended providing them with other roles, such as choosing discussion topics and recording minutes (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008).

### **Conclusion on Book Clubs for Individuals with ASD**

Knowing that individuals with ASD may experience difficulty with social interactions and communication, as well as with reading comprehension, and that book clubs directly target these two areas, it makes sense for individuals with ASD to participate in book clubs. To date seven types of book clubs for individuals with ASD exist – two of which exist solely in print. Five focus on or include information for clubs targeting teenagers and adults, and three on children.

### **Adaptions to Maximize Learning for Individuals with ASD**

Although many of the above-mentioned book clubs offer examples of adaptions to aid individuals with ASD in developing reading comprehension and social skills, all in an optimized learning environment, it is critical to take a further look at what can be done to promote these abilities. However, before taking a closer look, it is important to discuss the principle of least dangerous assumption. This principle states that instructors should always assume individuals with ASD know more than what they can show, rather than less. This, in turn, means providing opportunities that are diverse, stimulating, and challenging. It also suggests including typically developing peers in these opportunities (Donnellan & Leary, 1995 as cited in Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). In fact, when children with ASD are placed in the general classroom, they often demonstrate unexpected growth (Kliewer, 1996; Kliewer & Biklen, 2001; Martin, 1994; Rubin, Biklen, et al., 2001, as cited in Kluth, 2003).



**Adaptions to aid with reading comprehension**

*Theory of mind.* In order to help individuals learn how to make inferences, an instructor can model how they think when they read (Baker, 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008). This is known as the think aloud, and involves the instructor reading and pointing to sections of the text where individuals might run into difficulty while sharing and writing down their own thinking (Tovani, 2000, as cited in Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). For example, the instructor could show how they use their own background knowledge to decide how a character is feeling (Baker, 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008).

Because individuals with ASD have been shown to be strong visual learners, having students draw a scene from the text and filling in thought bubbles above the characters head, or providing a copied picture from the text with pre-drawn thought bubbles to be filled out, might aid in understanding what characters are thinking as well (ASHA, 2006, Wellman, et al., 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008). An instructor might also ask a variety of questions to the individual with ASD, such as applicative (inserting oneself into the text) and transactive (inserting oneself into the perspective of a character or the author) (Ruddell, 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008).

*Executive function.* To help individuals with ASD make personal connections with the text, they can be asked to share with the instructor or peers any connections they can think of, whether from their own life or from television, video games, and other sources (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). To help start this process, a concrete title or abstract of the text might be provided (Wahlberg & Magliano, 2004, as cited in Langer & Watson, 2008). Ven diagrams and KWL charts, where the individual writes what they

*know*, what they *want* to know, and what they *learned*, can also be used to assist in this (May, Rinehart, Wilding, & Cornish, 2013, as cited in Nguyen, Leytham, Whitby, & Gelfer, 2015; Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). In order to help individuals learn how to monitor their comprehension while reading, an instructor can again use the “think-aloud” to model how they think when they read, as well as to teach individuals to write down questions as they read (Styslinger, 2012; Baker, 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008). Here, an instructor would show how to figure out confusing areas by using background knowledge as well as using repair strategies such as re-reading (Baker, 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008). Another suggestion is to provide questions spaced throughout the reading, which encourage individuals to take a closer look at the text (O’Connor & Klein, 2004, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008).

The ability to retell a story can be aided through an adapted guided reciprocal question approach (Helfeldt & Henk, 1990; King, 1995; Whalon & Hanline, 2008, as cited in Nguyen, Leytham, Whitby, & Gelfer, 2015). In this approach, the instructor asks a question and gives the answer, then asks the individual and the individual answers. Finally the individual asks the instructor the question for the instructor to answer. Providing individuals with a story map or outline before reading can also help with recall (Mandler & Johnson, 1977, as cited Lanter & Watson, 2008). Using guided reciprocal question approach along with a story map or outline may benefit students ability to retell information learned through reading.

***Weak central coherence.*** In order to build background knowledge before reading, individuals with ASD might benefit from seeing visuals of what they will be reading about and learning vocabulary by pairing the visuals with text (Hulme, 2013; Gately,

2008; Kopepenhaver, 2010; PTM; Fossett & Mirenda, 2006, as cited in Nguyen, Leytham, Whitby, & Gelfer, 2015). Another suggestion is to do a picture walk, where the instructor and students look at only the pictures or illustrations in a book and discuss them (Zimmerman & Hutchins, 2003, as cited in Nguyen, Leytham, Whitby, & Gelfer, 2015). Having the instructor tell of their own personal connections, having individuals ask family members, or showing a video clip are other ways to help build background knowledge (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008).

To aid with understanding small areas in the text as well as big picture ideas, the instructor might consider using factual and inferential questions. Factual questions will be easier for individuals with ASD and therefore more motivating, while inferential questions will ask about areas that individuals with ASD struggle with – information not explicitly stated and central themes (Ruddell, 2002, Dennis et al., 2001, Griswold et al., 2002, Happé, 1994, Minshew et al., 1995, 1997, Tager-Flusberg, 1981, Smith-Myles et al., 2002, as cited in Lanter & Watson, 2008).

In order to help with figurative language, an instructor might want to choose text with illustrations, which individuals with ASD can then use in deciphering. Even better than illustrations are colored photographs, which are known as transparent symbols because they are not abstract, and therefore easier to understand (Fuller & Lloyd, 1991, as cited in Beukelman & Miranda, 2013). Individuals can also draw their own literal definition and have a personal dictionary (Myles, 2005, as cited in Styslinger, 2012; Kluth, 2003).

When teaching general vocabulary, it is best to focus most on words that are considered Tier II (words which are not easy to conceptualize, morphologically complex,

and considered academic but not content specific). These can be taught in an instruction sequence where, after reading the text in which they appear, students look at how the word is presented in the story, say the word, listen to the instructor give an explanation, listen to examples of the word used in situations outside of the story, interact with the word through an activity, and then say the word again (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). The instructor can also have an extended word wall displaying the words along with their synonyms, and a sentence and picture for each. This can be turned into a small, portable version for personal use as well (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). Tier III words, which are academic and content specific but not used often in language, are also worth teaching in order for students to understand the text in which they appear; however, these words do not require as much attention (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Addressing general and content specific vocabulary may enhance a student's reading comprehension.

***Book Adaptions.*** For individuals who struggle to read a book at grade level, the format can be adapted so they receive the same content, but in a different form. The text can be simplified and short summaries can be added to the end of paragraphs or chapters. Individuals can also listen to the text using an audio version (Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008). For those with vision difficulty, the text can be raised and enlarged, keywords highlighted, and texture added to illustrations. Tricks for making these modifications include letting glue dry over words to raise the text and pasting different materials, such as fabric and pipe cleaners, to pictures to add texture (Martin & Carle, 1997, as cited in Kluth & Chandler-Olcott, 2008).

**Adaptions to aid with social communication and interaction.** Discussion can be supported in a variety of ways. One way is through explicit instruction by watching a

video of a discussion and then creating a list of rules (Styslinger, 2012). In addition, turn-taking can be facilitated through using tokens (Sofia, 2010, as cited in Styslinger, 2012). To aid with generating topics, an instructor can provide individuals with ASD with conversation cards and by giving prompts in advance (Myles, 2005, as cited in Styslinger, 2012; Kluth, 2003). Individuals with ASD might also be more likely to share information if they can do so in a less direct manner, such as wearing a hat or using a prop, or if the questions are asked in sing-song (Kluth, 2003).

In a 2014 study by Lynn Kern Koegel, Mi N. Park, and Robert L. Koegel, the researchers found that using an instructional procedure known as self-management can improve conversations with children with ASD. The children were told to produce the following responses during conversation: answer a question, expand on the answer, and ask a related question in return, preferably one after the other. They were then provided with a sheet to keep track of their responses. Eventually, the paper was faded away, and at the end of the treatment, all participants were able to generalize what they had learned to new conversation partners. Of the participants who were able to return for retesting one year after the treatment was provided, all showed growth in the number of responses (Koegel, Park, & Koebel, 2014).

**Important environmental adaptations.** Because some individuals with ASD may have an under- or over-reaction to sensory input, they can benefit from an adapted environment that allows them to feel safe and relaxed. In terms of lighting, fluorescent lighting in particular has been disturbing for individuals with ASD (Kluth, 2003). This can be addressed through turning off some of the lights, moving the student's seat away from directly under the lighting, and using the windows to provide natural light

(Kennedy, 2002 as cited in Kluth, 2003). When individuals are too sensitive to sounds, reducing noise by bringing in rugs or changing sounds (such as finding a different way to congratulate besides applause) can help. When smells are too distracting, two techniques include avoiding wearing perfume and not bringing food in the room. In terms of seating, an individual with ASD might prefer certain types of seats (for example, a bean bag or rocking chair), the floor (using a clipboard as a work service), or no seating at all, instead focusing best by moving around. Even with all of these adaptations in place, a designated quiet area is still sometimes needed.

If a student appears to demonstrate repetitive movements, such as flapping or rocking, it is best not to interfere because this may be how they cope with sensory information. It is also important to note making small changes like different seats can mean avoiding big changes, such as having to leave the room, and that making adaptations public and not secret allows other individuals with ASD to realize if an adaptation for someone else might also suit themselves. For individuals with ASD who struggle with change, it helps to have a schedule in a prominent location (Kluth, 2003).

### **Methodology**

With knowledge gained from the literature review, the researcher created a workbook for anyone interested in starting a book club for children with ASD. As previously stated, children with ASD often develop depression in adolescence; therefore, this workbook is written for book clubs targeting grades three through four in order to reach children before adolescence. The workbook covered determining the book club's location, modifying the space, choosing books, recruiting members, and running sessions – both the first session and four example sessions based off of four books.

When picking books for the example session, the researcher solely chose books with some type of visual support, whether illustration or photography, and at the appropriate grade level. In addition, whenever possible, the researcher chose award winning or popular titles, in order to ensure the quality of the writing, and books that came in electronic formats, so children who needed the text read aloud had an easy way to do so. The researcher also made sure that there was representation of both males and females. Two of the four books were nonfiction because these books tend to be understood easier by individuals with ASD. The first was *Spiders* by Nic Bishop which featured easily understood photographs, and the second was *Temple Did It, and I Can Too! Seven Simple Life Rules* by Jennifer Glipin Yacio, which focused on and was approved by Temple Grandin, a famous woman with ASD. The other two books were fiction. The first was a graphic novel, *Zita the Spacegirl* by Ben Hatke, chosen because graphic novels are an excellent way to have lots of visual support while remaining age appropriate, and in the hope that since was the first in a series, the members might seek out the sequels. The other fiction work was *Frindle* by Andrew Clements; this book would be the most challenging for children with ASD because it had the most text and least visual support. However, this type of book needed to be included because it is a type of literature children will come across in school. Nearly all the adaptations suggested in the literacy review for improving literacy and social interaction, as well as creating a space conducive to learning, were implemented.

While the literature review shows that several book clubs and resources for creating clubs exist, none are completely comprehensive. In fact, only one of these resources, the book *Programming for Children and Teens with Autism Spectrum*

*Disorder*, actually provides a lesson plan. This lack of information forces people interested in starting a book club to fill in the blanks as best they can – hopefully through research, but potentially (and dangerously) by guessing. Furthermore, no existing club or resource specifically target children grades three through four with ASD. Therefore, this workbook is extremely important. It is the researchers’ hope that this book might be used by librarians, parents, speech-language pathologists, psychologists, and teachers in creating book clubs, and because it will be freely available, cost will not serve as deterrent. While the four lesson plans are tailored to specific books, each lesson plan was created with enough detail to allow book club facilitators to apply the various aspects (whether asking certain kinds of questions, carrying out vocabulary instruction, etc.) to any book.

However, there are some limitations. While the four books around which the lesson plans are created feature characters of different gender and with ASD, they do not feature a racially diverse cast of characters, making them not fully representative. In addition, this work book has not yet been reviewed by an individual with ASD, nor has it been implemented – meaning its effectiveness can not be guaranteed. It is recommended that these limitations be addressed in future research.



# STARTING A BOOK CLUB FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Created by:  
Elizabeth Kosmicki  
University of Northern Iowa  
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## Introduction

### Why a Book Club?

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder\* (ASD) struggle with social communication and interaction, and this can result in bullying and a lack of friendships, which in turn becomes one of the reasons why many individuals with ASD suffer from depression, especially in adolescence. Individuals with ASD also often have difficulty with literacy, or reading and writing, as well. Literacy is an essential skill in the workplace, and low levels of literacy are connected with poverty and unemployment.

In book clubs, members read books and then discuss them. In other words, book clubs involve literacy and social communication and interaction which individuals with ASD struggle in. By being a member of a book club that has been specifically tailored to meet these needs, individuals with ASD can therefore work towards enhancing these skills.

### What You Can Expect

This workbook specifically focuses on creating a book club for children with ASD in grades three-four. Third and fourth graders have not yet reached adolescence, so these grades were chosen in order to reach children with ASD before they develop depression.

In the workbook, you will find many suggestions of how to start and facilitate a book club for children with ASD, including lesson plans for your first session and for four different books, as well as forms and templates you can print off and use in your book club.

*\* some, especially those who have ASD, prefer the term ASD or Autistic individuals*

## Two Important Thoughts

While utilizing this workbook, it is important to constantly keep in mind these two thoughts:

### 1. *Every Child is Different*

Autism Spectrum Disorder includes the word spectrum because there is a huge variety in how the disorder manifests itself. For example, one child with ASD may demonstrate the repetitive movement of flapping, while another may rock instead. Or a child might flap and rock, or they may show no repetitive movements at all. In addition, remember that there is more to each child than ASD. They are just as varied as children without ASD, meaning they have different strengths and weaknesses that have nothing to do with their disorder.

This workbook gives recommendations based on general patterns seen in children with ASD, but not all of these recommendations may actually be effective or even necessary for your book club members. It is important to look at each child and ask, “What does *this* child need?”

### 2. *Make the Least Dangerous Assumption*

Making the least dangerous assumption means assuming that each individual is more capable than what they are able to demonstrate. Imagine a child who is unable to talk. Rather than assuming they are unable to talk because they do not know any words, assume that they understand everything they are hearing, they just can't get any words to come out of their mouth. Provide each child with

a rich learning environment full of exciting and challenging opportunities. As much as possible, try to include typically developing peers. Though this workbook focuses on how to support children with ASD in a book club, it is strongly recommended that children with ASD partake in an inclusive book club. Rather than using this book to create a new book club, use it to adapt an already existing club or, if there are no book clubs for third-fourth graders in your area, create one for both children with ASD and children without. Children with ASD have much to teach their typically developing peers, and vice versa.

## Finding the Right Space & Other Considerations

### Location and Set Up

Because some children with ASD are hyper- or hypo-sensitive (receiving too much or too little sensory input), the space in which book club meetings are held is very important. When finding a space, consider the following:

- *Lighting:* Both the light and sound emitted by fluorescent light bulbs can be bothersome. Try picking a room without fluorescents, turning only some of the fluorescent lights on, using natural light from windows, or moving any children bothered by the lights so they are not directly under them.
- *Sounds:* For children bothered by noise, try choosing a quiet environment, bringing in carpets to help absorb some of the sound, and finding alternatives to loud noises (such as waving both hands instead of clapping to show appreciation – at first glance, this may not appear to apply to a book club but what if you bring in guest speakers?)
- *Smells:* Avoid wearing perfume and bringing in snacks, so as not to bother children who are hypersensitive to smell.
- *Seating:* Explore a wide variety of seating options – regular chairs, bean bags, the floor – or even no seating option at all, instead allowing any children who wish to walk around. Some children with ASD need their body to be touching something to focus, others need to feel their body moving around.

Routine can be very important to some children with ASD, so it is a good idea to include a schedule of what will happen during the meeting where all can see it. Consider providing guardians with the schedule for each meeting ahead of time, so they can review it with their child as many times as their child desires. This way, when the children come to the book club meetings, they can be confident in knowing what to expect.

A final consideration in choosing a space for holding a book club is that these members are in third and fourth grade. Therefore, they are probably being driven to the meeting by their guardians, who may not want to drive home then back again to pick up their child, and may want to be close by during the actual meeting. They may be bringing other children along as well. Therefore, it is important to pick a location that will have seating for parents and siblings, something to keep the siblings occupied, and some way for these parents to keep an eye on their child during the meeting.

One ideal location that would meet all of these requirements is the local public library. Oftentimes, libraries rent out meeting rooms for free. The library is already a quiet place, and these meeting rooms would be even quieter. You may be able to find one with windows that can let in natural light, and the library may let you pull in various types of chairs that are already available in the general area. These meeting rooms tend to have windows facing the general area as well, so parents can look in and see their child. In addition, the library offers plenty of space for parents and siblings to sit, as well as things to do for both people of all ages.

### Length of Time/Frequency

In terms of length of time and frequency of meetings, meetings should be around 1 hour, 15 minutes. The 15 minutes allows for members to arrive and leave, as well as

general conversation. The hour is for the actual book club meeting. The first 25 minutes are for discussing the book, the second 25 minutes for a related activity, and the final 10 minutes for introducing next session's book. Meetings should be held once a month in order to allow each member plenty of time to read as much of the book as they are able to, given that the books will most likely be different lengths and some members will need more support which might slow down reading (for example, having the book read aloud to them). Members should never be penalized for not finishing the book.

### Types of Books

In general, nonfiction books and books with pictures, especially photographs, are easier for children with ASD to understand. This is because nonfiction books involve less figurative language and social situations. In addition, books with pictures are easier because the images provide support in understanding the text; photographs are even better than illustrations because they are not as abstract. Think about it like this: if it is a photo of a boy, you know it is of a boy. If it is a drawing of a stick figure, is it of a boy, a man, or even a girl or woman? Therefore, when picking out a book for your club, you want to consider if it is fiction or not fiction, and what visual supports are available.

Other considerations when choosing books include relevancy, availability as an e-book, and notoriety. Ideally, the book should reflect your members, featuring characters close in age and diverse – for example, in gender, ability, and race. You also want to pick books available as e-books. Though there are many ways for a child who needs a book read aloud to receive that service, e-books can be read aloud by an e-reader, which some libraries have available for free. Finally, you want to pick books recognized by various



organizations and frequently read by children. Books are bestsellers and award winners for a reason; your members will want to read a book that is enjoyable.

It is also important to keep in mind the age of the members. A book might be an award-winning picture book, but upon closer inspection, you may find it is meant for preschoolers. That wouldn't be a good pick for a book club composed of third-fourth graders.

Individuals with ASD often have strong areas of interest. Choosing a book in this area can definitely make it a motivating read; however, in a book club, there is more than one member. If you decide to go this route, you will want to make sure to discuss books on everyone's favorite subjects. You will also have to be careful that when discussing these books, the person whose area of interest the book covers does not dominate the conversation. Or, it might be preferable to simply have one meeting where everyone brings in a book about their favorite subject and gets to present on this.

At the end of this workbook, I will provide four lesson plans for four books you can include in your book club. All of these books are notable, have pictures, and are written for third-fourth graders. Two are nonfiction, and three are available as e-books. They include male and female protagonists, and one is centered on a real individual with ASD.

However, even these books may not have enough support for your members. Having an e-book is not the only adaption for members. For members who are at a grade level lower than the book, you can simplify the text and add short summaries end of each paragraph or chapter. In addition, for members with difficulty seeing, you can raise and enlarge the text, highlight keywords, and add texture to illustrations. Text can be raised

by gluing over the words and letting it dry and texture created by gluing different materials onto pictures - or example, using a pompom as a rabbit tail.

### Regarding Members

In order to recruit members, you might send out emails to all of the local schools, letting them know about your book club so they can pass the information on to guardians. You might also contact different organizations, such as parent support groups, and clinics – speech-language pathology, physical therapy, occupational therapy, etc. Bookstores and libraries (even if you don't hold your meetings at libraries) would be good places to post notices as well. Once you have members signing up, you should send their guardians a form so you can find out about their children before the first meeting, plus have important contact information in case of emergencies. A suggested membership form is included on the next page.

### Suggested Membership Form

Name:  
Grade:  
Guardian(s):  
Phone Number:  
Email:

Favorite Books:

Likes (if applicable, please include sensory information. For example, likes weighted blanket):

Dislikes (if applicable, please include sensory information):

Any repetitive behaviors and what they generally mean:

Anything else you feel we should know about your child?

## First Book Club Meeting

This first meeting serves three purposes. First, it begins to establish relationships between the members themselves, as well as between the members and the facilitator. Second, it teaches the members how to be a part of a book club discussion. Third and finally, it introduces the members to the book for the next session.

### Schedule:

1. Get To Know You Activity
2. What are Your Talents?
3. Book Club Video
4. Book Club Discussion Sheet
5. Decorate a Reading Journal
6. Discuss Next Session's Book

Once every member has settled in, it is time to review the schedule. Point to each of the activities and give a brief description for each. This should be done at the beginning of every session, to create a sense of structure.

There are many types of Get To Know You activities; you might be able to think of some from a retreat or when you were in school. One example would be to have each member take a turn and stand up, say their name, and something they like – food, sport, color, TV show, etc.. Everyone who liked that same thing would then stand up, so that they would all see what they shared in common.

Following this activity, the facilitator should ask each member to share their own special talent, which the facilitator would then write on a piece of paper to display at each

meeting. This helps the members see that everyone has something unique to contribute, and in future discussions, they can ask each other to share information on their area of expertise. For example, one of the suggested books in this workbook is *Zita the Spacegirl* by Ben Hatke, featuring a girl who is sucked through a portal onto another planet. If one of the members knew a lot about outer space, they could be asked in the discussion to help elaborate on topics such as asteroids.

For the Book Club Video, find a YouTube video that shows a book club discussion. Try to find one that features members taking turns, elaborating on each other's statements, disagreeing politely, asking questions, and using the book and notes to support their discussion. Before watching the video, tell your members that this is how a book club discussion works, and show them a large list of everything you want them to look for (the same things you were looking for when finding a good video). Afterwards, discuss what you saw, and if your members come up with anything else not on the list that they saw, add to it! This will serve as a list of rules for future sessions, and is important because sometimes individuals with ASD need explicit instruction on how to partake in social interactions.

Here is one example of a YouTube video you might use:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djazf786BZo>

This is of a fourth grade classroom book club. While this video does not feature members asking questions or disagreeing politely, it does show members using notes and books, as well as naturally building off of each others' ideas through polite conversation.

Next provide each member with a sheet of paper of discussion reminders: answer, say more, and ask a question (see the next page for a template). Explain that these are the

**ANSWER**

**SAY MORE**

**ASK**  
**QUESTION**

Adapted from Koegel, L. K., Park M. N.,  
and Koegel, R. L., 2014

responses that book club members have in discussions. Give an example such as, “What if someone asks you, ‘did you like that book club video?’ You might say, ‘Yes [point to answer]. I liked it because [point to say more] it taught me what a book club is about.’ And then you would ask [point to ask a question], ‘Did you like the video too?’ Then explain that you want to practice this with your members. Ask a member, “What are you most excited for about book club?” and encourage them to follow the reminders. If you have members who appear to shy to speak, or problems with interruptions, offer a “special book club” microphone. Only the person holding the microphone can speak, and it may help members become more willing to participate because it helps distance them from the act of discussing by adding an aspect of play-acting.

Follow this with decorating a reading journal. This journal should be a three-ring binder with pockets. The rings should already hold the discussion reminder sheet, blank sheets of paper; later worksheets and handouts can be added for each individual book discussed. In the pockets there should be a stack of sticky notes. Ideally, the students should already know how to use this journal because in the video watched earlier, they saw members use notes while discussing their book. Stress that this reading journal is optional, and they can use it as little or as much as they want. There is no homework in book club! Provide the members with a variety of art supplies to personalize their journal.

At the end of the session, introduce the members to the book to be discussed at the next session. The goal of introducing the book at the session before it is discussed is to help build background knowledge, and start members thinking about making connections with the text. In the following lesson plans for the four example books, look under Before Reading the Book to see what to do during this time.

Important: during this meaning, note if any members are nonverbal and have no way to communicate with the club. In future sessions, these members can become involved during the discussion portion by drawing questions out of a hat.



*Spiders* by Nic Bishop

## About this book:

ISBN-13: 978-0439877565

Grade level or Age Range: preschool – third grade

Nonfiction with photographs

Available as e-book on Amazon: No

## Awards/Recognition:

- 2008 Robert F. Sibert Honor Book
- 2008 Orbis Pictus Honor Book
- 2008 Gryphon Honor Book
- 2008 American Library Association Notable Book
- School Library Journal Best Book List
- Nw York Public Library 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing
- 2007 Kirkus Editor's Choice
- 2007 Irma S. and James H. Black Honor Book Award
- and more...

Summary: Featuring photographs taken by the author himself, this book discusses various spiders and how they are alike and different – how they eat, sense, molt, spin webs, catch prey, impress mates, and care for their young.

## Before Reading the Book:

As stated earlier, the goal of introducing the book at the session before it is discussed is to help build background knowledge and start members thinking about making connections with the text. For *Spiders*, the facilitator can lead members on a

picture walk, discussing what is going on in each picture. The pictures go along well with the text on each page, so talking through the pictures will aid students when they read.

This is also the time to introduce Tier III vocabulary, or words not commonly used in conversation but necessary for understanding the book, which can be found in the glossary at the back of the book. Both this glossary, and the index also featured in *Spiders* should be discussed with members.

The members can also start to fill out a KWL chart about what they knew, want to know, or learned (see the next page for a template), which can then be added to their reading journal. Members can write in, draw on, or glue pictures with text onto the chart (provide pictures with text of the spiders included in the book, as well as general images of a web, spider, food, house, etc.)

### After Reading the Book:

#### Schedule:

1. Discussion
2. Activity/Activities: Guest Speaker and/or Make Your Own Spider
3. Discuss Next Session's Book

As always, begin the session with a review of the schedule. Then start the discussion. The discussion will feature instruction on *Tier II words* (words which are not easy to conceptualize, morphologically complex - such as successful, which is a adjective but can be a verb as succeed and a noun as successful - and considered academic but not content specific) as well as four types of questions:

1. *factual*: asking about information easy to find in the text
2. *inferential*: requiring readers to “read between the lines”

# KWL CHART

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3. *applicative*: inserting oneself in to the text
4. *transactive*: walking in the shoes of the author or subject/characters

<b>What I KNOW</b>	<b>What I WANT to know</b>	<b>What I LEARNED</b>

Script of Topics and Questions for Discussion:

- (Factual) How many types of spiders are there?
- (Tier II) Point out the words similar and difference (found on page 8). Have everyone say them, and put them on a large sheet of paper with the title “Word Wall.” Give each member a Mini Word Wall sheet to add to their Reading Journal and encourage members to write the word, draw the word, or glue a piece of paper with the word printed on it (see next page for the Mini Word Wall sheet). Explain how things that are similar are the same. They are alike, and when there is a difference that means things are different, not the same, not alike. Then explain that all of the types of spiders have differences, like how the jumping spider has huge eyes while other spiders have no eyes. But they are still all called spiders because they are similar. For example, they all have six legs. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the words on the Word Wall, and encourage members to do the same in their reading journal.
- (Tier II) What are some differences among you? How are you similar?
- (Factual and Tier II) How many years can a tarantula live? (point out this is a difference)
- (Tier II) Point out camouflaged (page 11). As everyone says the word, add it to the Word Wall. Explain how when something is camouflaged, it blends in with its background. It is like a disguise. The green lynx spider on page 11 is

# MINI WORD WALL

Word	Simile	Definition	Picture

camouflaged because it is the same color as the leaf it is on. An example not in the book would be the character Randall from Monsters Inc. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

- (Inferential and Tier II) Why would a spider want to camouflage itself?
- (Tier II) Point out the word successful (page 7). To be successful means to be good at something. Camouflage helps spiders be successful by escaping predators. Draw everyone's attention to the list of member's talents from the first session. Those talents are some of the things that everyone at book club is successful at. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Inferential and Tier II) What are draglines for? (point out that these help spiders be successful)
- (Applicative) What would you think if you had to shed your skin?
- (Applicative) What would you do if you saw a spider?
- (Transactive) Why do you think shedding skin is so stressful for spiders?
- (Transactive) How does the author feel about spiders?
- (Tier II) A good word for how the author feels about spiders is that he thinks they are extraordinary. Point to extraordinary in the text (page 16).  
Extraordinary means being super awesome at something. It means being very successful. Everyone at book club is extraordinary because of the things they are successful at. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) What spider in the book do you think is extraordinary? Why?

If the members are having trouble answering any of the questions, do a “think-aloud,” where you use the text and your reader journal to show how you went about answering the question.

After the discussion, have everyone fill out the know in their KWL if they haven’t already. Discuss what all the members learned.

Follow discussion with some activities. One activity would be to invite someone who is an expert on spiders, such as professor or science teacher in the town you live in, or someone from a pet store. Let them talk with your members and have your members ask them questions.

For another activity, provide the members with rubber or plastic spiders and art supplies. Tell the members they are going to camouflage the spider, so they can hide it at home and see if anyone in their family sees it. While decorating and afterwards, talk about how the members’ spiders are extraordinary, similar, and different. Predict whether the camouflage will be successful.

End the session by discussing the book for the next session.



*Temple Did It, and I Can Too! Seven Simple Life Rules* by Jennifer Gilpin

Yacio

About this book:

ISBN-13: 978-1935567523

Grade level or Age Range: 5-12 years

Nonfiction with illustration

Available as e-book on Amazon: Yes

Awards/Recognition:

- 2015 Academic's Choice Award

Summary: Featuring an introduction by Temple Grandin, this tells the story of Temple Grandin's life, paired with seven rules she has devised for living life. It is delivered in the form of story about a boy with Autism asking Temple how she became so successful.

Before Reading the Book:

Help your members develop background knowledge about Temple Grandin by watching a video of her speaking online. Consider using the following YouTube clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWYom1ON63w>

After Reading the Book:

Schedule:

1. Discussion
2. Activities: Apply the Seven Rules to Your Life and/or Learn How to Use the Library Catalogue
3. Discuss Next Session's Book

After going through the schedule, start the discussion.

Script of Topics and Questions for Discussion:

- (Factual) What is the life rule Temple thinks is most important? Which rule do you think is most important and why?
- (Tier II) Point out the word passion (page 7). Have everyone say the word while you write it on the Word Wall. Explain that passion is when you really like or are interested in something. Temple's passion is cows. Tell everyone what your passion is. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) What is your passion?
- (Tier II) Look at the word style on page 11. Write it on the word wall while everyone says it. Style is something you do that is different from other people; it is unique. A person's style can be what they wear; Temple's style is her cowgirl shirt. It can also be what someone rides, such as a jeep, a bike, or a skateboard, or it can be how you sing, like country, opera, or pop. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Inferential and Tier II) What made Temple's style unique?
- (Tier II) Point out influential (page 18). Have all the members say the word and add it to the Word Wall. Influential means to cause something to change. To effect something. Temple is influential in animal behavior and autism; other people listen to her talk, and they follow her advice, like the boy in the story. Temple was influential to him. Tell the members about someone who

influenced you. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

- (Inferential and Tier II) Who was probably one of the most influential people in Temple's life?
- (Applicative) If you met Temple, what would you ask her?
- (Applicative) What would you have said to Temple if you saw her being teased?
- (Transactive) Why would business people not want to be around messy people?
- (Transactive) Do you think Temple liked cleaning the horse stalls?
- (Tier II) Look at page v and discuss discipline. Have everyone say discipline, and write it on the Word Wall. Discipline means to be focused and do something, even when you don't want to. Temple had to have disciplined to clean the horse stalls. Talk about how you need discipline in order to do your homework before you play. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) When do you have to be disciplined in your life?
- (Tier II) Now look at develop on page v. While everyone says it, write it on the Word Wall. To develop means to get better. Become more skilled and become more knowledgeable. Temple developed her knowledge by learning about how to help animals. Sometimes you need discipline in order to develop, like when you do your homework even though you don't want to.

Doing your homework helps you get better at what you are learning in school.

Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

- (Tier II) What is an area you would like to develop?

For the activity, explain to your members that you are all going to apply Temple's seven life rules to your own life. You are going to think about how they fit you by filling out a work sheet, and if you are holding your book club at the library, tell them that one way you can start developing them is by checking out a book at the library. The library is full of books, and you can help the members find a book to read about their passions and interests. When they are done with their work sheet, you will help them use the library catalogue to do this.

Show your members the workbook pages at the back of the book (22-23) and have them fill it out. Provide magazines that they can cut pictures out as well as various printed images with words that they can glue to help them if they are unable to write or draw what they want to put in. Encourage conversation and the use of the tier II vocabulary while they work. When a member finishes, look at their paper with them and see what talent or passion they have decided to develop. Then use the library catalogue together on a laptop to find their book, which they can find with their guardians after book club.\*

End the session by discussing next week's book.

*\*If you decide to search books up on the library catalogue, make sure to tell your members' guardians at the previous session about this, as well as send them a reminder email. You will also need to be available afterwards to help out.*

*Zita the Spacegirl* by Ben Hatke

About this book:

ISBN-13: 978-1596434462

Grade level: 3 and up

Fiction Graphic Novel, First in a Series

Available as e-book on Amazon: Yes

Awards/Recognition:

- New York Times Bestseller

Summary: When a mysterious button falls on Earth and is discovered by a girl named Zita and her friend Joseph, Zita impulsively presses it, sending her Joseph to another planet. Zita follows to rescue Joseph, and along the way she makes many new friends with different talents and speech/forms of communication. In finding Zita's friend, they inadvertently save the planet from destruction. However, at the end, only Joseph is able to return to Earth, so Zita must find another way to go home. This is the first in a series.

Before Reading the Book:

Build background knowledge by doing a picture walk and trying to guess what is happening in the pictures. Talk about what you know about outer space and aliens from movies and TV shows like *Star Wars*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and *Star Trek*. Have Tier III vocabulary pictures of an asteroid and meteoroid.

Discuss that the book talks about a prophecy. Explain that a prophecy is a prediction of what will happen in the future. Two examples from popular culture are Harry Potter being prophesied to defeat Lord Voldemort in *Harry Potter* and King Arthur

being crowned when he pulled the sword from the stone because it was prophesied that the person who could free the sword would be king.

In order to aid with recall, provide each member with a story outline of *Zita the Spacegirl* before they leave (see next page for outline).

### After Reading the Book:

#### Schedule:

1. Discussion
2. Activity: Create Your Own Alien
3. Discuss Next Session's Book

Once you have reviewed the schedule, it is time for the discussion. This discussion will include an additional focus: idioms.

#### Script of Topics and Questions for Discussion:

- (Factual) Why is everyone trying to leave the planet when Zita arrives?
- (Factual) How is the gateway originally damaged?
- (Tier II) Look at the word shattered as a group (50). Add it to the Word Wall, and have them say it together. Tell the members that shattered is another word for broken into little pieces, or destroyed. The gateway was shattered when Strong-Strong stepped on it. If you dropped a glass, it would shatter. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.(Tier II) Point out the word loyalty (page 152). Add it to the Word Wall while the members say the word together. Explain that loyalty is helping and staying with someone no matter what. Zita is loyal to Joseph when she follows him through the portal, and One is loyal by helping Zita rescue Joseph after she

## *Zita the Spacegirl* by Ben Hatke

# Story Outline

- **Zita** and **Joseph** discover a button.
- Zita presses the button, and Joseph disappears through a black hole.
- Zita goes after Joseph and arrives on a strange planet. She sees Joseph being kidnapped!
- The gateway (button) is destroyed by **Strong-Strong**, who is nice but being bullied by his boss.
- Zita learns the planet is going to be destroyed by an asteroid. Everyone is trying to leave.
- Zita defends **Piper**.
- Piper takes care of Zita. He fixes the gateway and helps her find out that Joseph is being kept in a castle by the Scriptorians.
- **Mouse**, Piper's friend, goes with Zita to rescue Joseph.
- Zita and Mouse meet **One**, who was trapped and being attacked.
- They arrive at the Rusted Wastes, a city destroyed by a powerful weapon which was supposed to destroy the asteroid.
- They meet **Randy**.
- They are attacked, but Piper comes to rescue them.



- Near the place where Joseph is, Piper and Zita are captured. Piper told the Scriptorians where Zita was in order to get fuel to escape the planet with.
- In prison, they discover the Scriptorians kidnapped Joseph because a prophecy said he would save them from the asteroid.
- Piper helps Zita out of prison, where she meets back up with Mouse, One, and Randy. Piper leaves.
- The friends rescue Strong-Strong from his bad boss, who they pretend to be in order to get into the castle.
- Strong-Strong, One, and Mouse help Zita and Randy reach Joseph.
- Zita is captured again, but Piper returns to help her.
- The asteroid has almost reached the planet, and suddenly Randy is glowing. He is the weapon that made the Rusted Wastes!
- Randy needs the crystal from Zita's gateway to work. He is able to destroy the asteroid.
- The Scriptorians think Joseph destroyed the asteroid because they couldn't see Randy. They want him to be king, but he does not.
- There is still enough power for the gateway to work, but only for one person. Zita lets Joseph go home.
- Zita needs to find a new way to get home.

saves him from his prison. Talk about how people can be loyal to sports teams by still cheering their team on even when they don't win any games, and how dogs are often called loyal because they follow their owners around. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

- (Inferential and Tier II) Five tells One, "It's because you were programmed with honor and loyalty. The rest of us don't have those defects" (page 152). Is five right?
- (Inferential) All of Zita's friends are different, but these differences make it so they each have special strengths that help them find Joseph and save the planet. What are they? (point out everyone's own special strengths on the talent list, and discuss how Strong-Strong, Mouse, Randy, and One all speak differently, yet this does not make them any better or worse than anyone else).
- (Tier II) Point out the word repair (page 60). As you write it on the Word Wall, have them say it together. Repair means to fix something that has been broken or damaged. Piper repairs the gateway. That is one of his special strengths. A mechanic repairs cars, and a doctor can repair a broken bone. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) Next point out the word torment (66). After writing it on the word wall, as well as having members say it out loud, explain that this means to bully or bother for a long time. The little aliens were tormenting One until Zita stopped them. Living things aren't the only things that torment. People can also be tormented by sad thoughts that won't leave them alone, and they

need someone to help them like Zita helped one. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

- (Factual and Tier II) When was another time Zita helped someone being tormented?
- (Applicative) Would you have pushed the button?
- (Interpretive) The Scriptorians want Joseph to stay and be their king since he fulfilled the prophecy. Why do they think that?
- (Applicative) Would you stay on a foreign planet and be king or go home?
- (Transactive) Why does Piper come back at the end? \*
- (Transactive) Why does Zita let Joseph go home? \*

\* for these questions, provide pictures of these scenes with little thought bubbles above the characters' head for your members to fill in.

- (Tier II) Focus on the word suspected (155). Write it on the word wall and have members say suspected out loud. Tell how suspected means thinking someone or something is going to happen. The Screed suspected Zita would come after Joseph. Give another example: maybe you bake cookies and find that there are only two left the next day; you might suspect your brother at them. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) What do you suspect will happen to Zita in the next book?

Hand out another worksheet, which will be used to record idioms (see next page for the template). Discuss the following idioms: cream of the crop (page 37), on the run (51), keep watch (82), and make short work (86) – providing examples of how they are

# Idiom Dictionary

Idiom	Picture

used in the story and in other situations - and have members draw what they mean.

For the activity, have members make their own alien. Get creative! Provide paper bags, pipe cleaners, sequins, googly eyes, craft paper, and other supplies. Then have members make up a short story about their alien, encouraging them to use one vocabulary word from the Word Wall or idiom in their story. Have everyone share their aliens before moving on to discuss next week's book.

*Frindle* by Andrew Clements

About this book:

ISBN-13: 978-0689818769

Grade level: 3-7

Fiction with sporadic illustrations

Available as e-book on Amazon: Yes

Awards:

- 1997 Christopher Award
- Rhode Island Children's Book Award 1998
- Judy Lopez Memorial Honor Book (L.A.) Award 97
- Great Stone Face Book Award (NH) 1997-1998
- Rebecca Caudill Young Readers Award (IL) 1999
- Massachusetts Children's Book Award 1998-1999
- William Allen White Children's Book Award (KS) 1998-1999
- Georgia Children's Book Award, 1998-1999
- And more...

Summary: Nick Allen has big ideas, and when he gets into a battle for control with his language arts teacher, Mrs. Granger, he uses his big ideas to create a new word: frindle for pen. Despite Mrs. Granger trying to stop the spread of Nick's new word, soon the entire school and United States are calling pens "frindles," and Nick is on talk shows and making money from people buying merchandise with the word frindle on them. Years later, frindle is added to the dictionary, and Nick receives a letter from Mrs. Granger explaining that she antagonized him on purpose in order to keep frindle on everyone's

mind by adding conflict to the story. In return, Nick uses his wealth to create a scholarship in her name.

### Before Reading the Book:

Do a picture walk and try to guess what is happening in the images. Provide members with a story outline (see next page).

### After Reading the Book:

#### Schedule:

1. Discussion
2. Activity: Guess the Meaning of my Word
3. Discuss Next Session's Book

As always, make sure to run through the schedule first. Then begin the discussion.

#### Script of Topics and Questions for Discussion:

- (Factual) What does Nick call the pen?
- (Tier II) Point out the word guaranteed (page 14). Write it on the Word Wall while members say the word together. Explain how guaranteed means that something has to happen. Nick's delaying questions at the end of class are always guaranteed to make the teacher so distracted they won't give out a homework assignment. There is no way the teacher will assign homework. Another example of this is when you buy something that says, "if you don't like this, return it and get all your money back, guaranteed." The seller is promising they will give you the money you spent on whatever you bought. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

## *Frindle* by Andrew Clements

### Story Outline

- **Nick** always has extraordinary ideas that work out.
- When he enters fifth grade, he gets a language arts teacher named **Mrs. Granger**, who gives students a lot of homework.
- Nick tries to distract Mrs. Granger from giving homework the first day of school by asking her a question.
- But Mrs. Granger assigns that question as Nick's homework instead.
- Nick tries to get revenge by taking the whole next class for his homework presentation. It doesn't work, so then he asks another distracting question: why do words mean what they do?
- Mrs. Granger says it is because people agree that they do.
- Nick finds a pen on the ground. He plans to call it frindle and to convince everyone to agree with this, making it mean pen.
- Nick's friends to help him, and they start calling pens frindles.
- Soon the whole school is using the word, and Mrs. Granger is mad. She tries to punish students, but that makes the students say frindle more.
- Mrs. Granger asks Nick to stop using the word, and when he says he won't, she says she will send him a letter when "all this is over."
- The principle visits Nick's parents to convince Nick to stop using frindle. Nick says it is too late. Everyone is using it.
- Frindle is on the news. Someone sent the reporter a picture of Nick, so he becomes famous.



- A businessman makes money off of frindle, and he gives some of it to Nick.
- Nick becomes quiet and no longer shares his ideas.
- Mrs. Granger tells Nick he needs to continue sharing his ideas and doing big things. He becomes happier again and does what she says.
- In college, Nick finally receives the letter from Mrs. Granger along with a dictionary. Frindle is now in the dictionary, and Mrs. Granger says she was mean because it helped make the word more popular.
- Someone sets up a scholarship in Mrs. Granger's name, and Nick sends her a letter and a gift.

- (Factual and Tier II) We learn that Nick's delaying questions are not actually guaranteed. How does Mrs. Granger outsmart Nick on the first day of class?
- (Inferential) Who paid for the scholarship in Mrs. Granger's name?
- (Inferential) Mrs. Granger's eyes are described as, "dark grey, and if they were turned to full power, they could make you feel like a speck of dust" (page 7).  
What does that mean?
- (Inferential) After Frindle becomes popular, just like Nick planned, Nick suddenly becomes quiet and withdrawn. He doesn't want to share his ideas with anyone anymore. Why?
- (Applicative) Would you have said the word frindle even if it meant getting in trouble?
- (Applicative) What would you do if you were as rich as Nick?
- (Transactive) How do you think Nick's mom feels when the principal visits their house? Nick's dad? \*provide a picture representing this conversation with thought bubbles above Nick's parents' heads for members to fill out.
- (Tier II) Take a look at the word stiffly (page 51). Write it on the Word Wall while saying the word. Show stiffly with your body, and explain how it means tight, uncomfortable. Show what shaking hands stiffly like the principal would look like, and explain how this means she didn't want to be there. Give an example of going to the dentist office, and sitting stiffly in the chair. Most people do not like the dentist, and wouldn't be able to relax. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) When was a time when you did something stiffly?

- (Tier II) Point out the word reputation (6). As the members say it, write it on the Word Wall. Explain that a reputation is when you are known for something. Mrs. Granger was known for assigning a lot of homework and loving the dictionary. Give an example of someone else with a reputation, like Al Roker who is known for talking about the weather. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Tier II) Next point out the word frantically (page 12). Write it on the Word Wall while members say the word. Explain that frantically means to do something fast, while you are scared because you are running out of time. The students in the book work on their homework frantically because the assignments are very long, so it is hard to finish them in time. A person who wakes up late for school would be running frantically to catch the bus. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.
- (Transactive and Tier II) At the beginning, no one likes Mrs. Granger because of her reputation. They even call her names, like Dangerous Grangerous. Do you think she deserves all of that hate?
- (Tier II) Examine the word endures (page 100). Write it on the Word Wall while members say it together. Tell the members that endures means to last a very long time. Words in the dictionary endure because people use them for many years. Mrs. Granger will endure, because the scholarship in her name is a million dollars. This means students will receive her scholarship even after she is no longer living. People will remember her. Talk about how old the

pyramids are and how they have endured. Add a simile, short definition, and picture to the word on the Word Wall.

Next discuss and have your members add the following idioms to their idiom dictionary: end of the line (page 8), plays for keeps (page 23), and mind your p's and q's (page 75).

For the activity, first read as a group how Nick and his friends showed the shopkeeper and Mrs. Granger's class what frindle meant. Explain that you are going to come up with your own new words, using the five new vocabulary words added to the Word Wall: guaranteed, stiffly, reputation, frantically, and endures. Put your book club members into five groups and have them each draw a word out of a hat. Then have them discuss how they will show the group what their new word means, without saying the old word. Let each group present and try to figure out what the old word is. You may want to give an example using a Word Wall word from a previous session.

At the end, review the book for next session.

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