

GREAT BOOKS

Book Reviews for Adult Reading and Writing Programs

by the

Readers to Leaders Project

of



Alameda County Library ■ Adult Literacy Program

Introduction:

As a teacher in a small group adult literacy program, I am constantly looking for good reading materials to use with students. In our program, students enjoy working in small groups. Our students are not separated into skill levels, so everyone can learn and teach each other. As a program, we have found that reading a book together, chapter by chapter, works well for the groups. Students say they feel they get a better understanding of a book when they continue with the same book each week. They feel they can really “get into” the story, and understand what an author is saying. Reading aloud and discussing the chapter together in class helps with word attack skills as well as comprehension. Discussions about the book often lead to writing prompts that we work on together in the class. In the past, the teacher usually brought in a few choices of books on the first day of class, students read part of the first chapter and voted for their choice.

Unfortunately, it has been hard to find materials that we, the teachers, thought students would like and that would appeal to our multi-level groups. The process involved a lot of guess work. We usually brought in books that we thought students would be interested in discussing and that are considered between a 4th and 8th grade reading level. But I wondered if maybe some books we passed up would actually be interesting to students, and I wanted to hear more about students’ own criteria for choosing books. My colleague suggested that we do a project where we ask students in our program to pick out books that we could use in classes. I thought that other programs might also find a list of recommended books helpful for their own students. So the Readers to Leaders Project was born.

In our project, a team of 6 students who volunteered to be participants met once a week for 4 months to work on choosing books that can be used as reading material in adult literacy programs. The students and I started with a discussion of what factors contributed to the students enjoying a book in a past class, and what made a book uninteresting or too difficult. They came up with a list of criteria, which I then used in selecting many books from lists of recommended reading from a variety of sources (see resource list for more information). I brought in a wide selection of books, and pairs of students chose one

that appealed to them. They read the first chapter or so to decide if they thought it would be interesting and a good level for adult literacy students. So most of the recommendations in this booklet are based on only the first chapters of the books, not the whole book. The students have also included some books that they have read and finished in past classes.

Each book review tells a little about what the beginning of the book is about and why the students liked it. They also listed the things they liked and didn't like about the book based on their original criteria. For example something the students liked was when a book encouraged them to think about their lives. An example of something they didn't like was when the book had small size print. The group also rated the difficulty level of the book on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 as very easy and 5 very hard. All this information is provided to you along with the book review.

You can use this booklet if your program works with small groups or does one-to-one tutoring. The group and I recommend that students read these reviews and lists to help them decide for themselves what book they want to read. We recommend that students be given choices of a few different books to read so that they can pick one that they like. In a group setting, they can pick the one that most of them are interested in reading and discussing together. Most of these books should be easily available through your local library or book seller. More information about how to get these books is included at the end of this booklet. We hope that you find the reviews helpful, and that they inspire other students to read some of these great books!

*Kiran Malavade
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