

Blogging on Books

What is a blog?

A blog, or web log, is a web site that features regularly updated entries posted in reverse chronological order. Beyond this key characteristic, blogs vary widely in authorship, purpose, format, and readership. A blog might be a personal diary read by a handful of friends, a social networking space, a political soapbox, a corporate marketing tool, a celebrity confessional, a wartime correspondence, or an educational tool. Blogs are generally written by individuals, though some have multiple authors. The majority of blogs allow visitors to leave comments, which can number in the hundreds per day on popular blogs. Most importantly, blogs are extraordinarily easy to create and maintain, requiring very little expertise and no money.

Why blog about books? Book blogs . . .

Give students a real audience

Allow students to collaborate

Create a sense of ownership

Capture meaning-making as it happens

Let students resituate books in rich contexts

Encourage creative and critical responses

How does a book blog work?

A book blog is a literary journal. You might think of the book blog as an online version of literature circles: students may be split into small groups of three to four, with each group reading the same text. As they read, students keep entries on their book blogs, and comment on the blogs of their group members. Here are a few ideas for entries:

- Link to a web site that you think the main character would like. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain your choice.
- Link to a web site that provides helpful background information on the text. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain your choice.
- Link to a web site that connects thematically or topically to the novel. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain your choice.
- Link to a review of the novel and offer a brief response to the review.
- Link to a web site that provides biographical information on the author. In 1-2 paragraphs, explain how this information affects your reading.
- Post an image that connects to the text and explain your choice in 1-2 paragraphs.
- Comment on the book blog of a group member.
- Write a first-person entry (letter, journal entry, email, voice mail) that captures the voice of the character and provides insight into him or her. Predict what will happen as the story unfolds.
- Write a missing scene the writer chose not to include.
- Choose a character that you identify with and explain why.
- Invent a character the writer should have included.
- Make a text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connection.
- Interview a character or the author.
- Pull a quote from the text and comment on its significance.
- Describe your own activity as the reader: What literary moves are you making?

Podcasting on Books

What is a podcast?

A podcast is an audio or video file that is distributed over the Internet. Unlike streaming audio or video, podcasts are produced at regular intervals and are available by subscription feed. Subscribing to a podcast involves using software such as RSS aggregator or iTunes to download the podcast to a computer—and if desired, a portable player. Uses for podcasts are numerous: many mainstream media outlets now offer complete or supplemental programming via podcast; special interest groups or individuals podcast on pet topics; educational institutes are exploring both teacher and student podcasting.

Why use a book podcast? Book podcasts . . .

Give students a real audience and purpose to write

Help students recognize and create mood

Encourage students to explore genres

Teach students multiple perspectives

Require students to select illustrative quotes

Demand a sense of pacing and dramatic tension

How does a book podcast work?

Think of the book podcast as a book talk in audio form: its main objective is to interest the audience in reading a particular book. It should include an engaging opener, key excerpts of the text, and basic information, like the author and the title. And since the podcast lacks any visual elements, it should retain our attention and interest through other means. A book podcast should:

- Make use of multiple voices/perspectives. You might, for example, interview one of the characters or the author, asking friends to play their role for your podcast.
- Use sound effects that go beyond narration. Background music can add mood and depth.
- Last at least 3 minutes but not more than 8.
- Be accompanied by a written script.
- Be published to the web.

Where can I get more information about blogs and podcasts?

Blogs

Set up your own blog:

Schoolblogs <http://www.schoolblogs.com>

Blogger <http://blogger.com>

Blogspirit <http://blogspirti.com>

Read about blogging in schools:

Weblogg-ed <http://www.weblogg-ed.com>

CogDogBlog <http://cogdogblog.com/>

Search for blogs:

Google Blog Search <http://blogsearch.google.com/>

Podcasts

Find and download podcasts at:

iTunes <http://itunes.com>

EPN Network <http://www.epnweb.org/>

Podcasting News <http://www.podcastingnews.com>

Download software to create podcasts:

Audacity <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

Easypodcast <http://www.easypodcast.com/>