



Kwame Alexander
BOOKFEST



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“I loved that I had great titles to choose from that I knew my students would love. Plus, they were high-interest books that students could be successful reading. I also appreciated that it came with the necessary tools for me to facilitate well. I would absolutely recommend it to my colleagues – it’s a great product!”

Start a book club focused on voice and choice.

It wasn’t difficult for Carrie Friday, Media Specialist, to sell her Southwest Middle School students in Palm Bay, Florida, on either a book club or one that involves Kwame Alexander. “I’ve had a lot of success with book clubs with my students and they LOVE Kwame Alexander and anything to do with him,” said Friday. “When I heard that Kwame was putting together book clubs with resources for educators, I knew that this would be a home run!”

Kwame Alexander Bookfest, exclusively from Follett, is based on the premise that student choice increases engagement and motivation. Available for Grades 3-8, it creates a unique book club experience by enabling students to choose their books and giving teachers the resources to inspire robust, student-led discussions. And giving students choice in what they read values the student and makes reading less of a chore.

It was easy for Friday to get behind an author with Alexander’s reputation. “I know that he only backs quality materials, so using this book club model is something that is quality and good for kids,” she said. Friday was right – her students enjoyed the Bookfest experience. As one Southwest Middle School student shared, “I liked the books – they were very interesting and entertaining. I couldn’t put them down! I enjoyed the book club format because then I could talk about the books that I read with someone else. It also forced me into reading something I might not have. It exposed me to how other people’s lives can be and how messed up they can get. It also exposed me to how the justice system can be wrong, like in *From the Desk of Zoe Washington* by Janae Marks. I’d say I learned a lot from the books.”

Beyond that, Friday was impressed with the diversity of the book titles – all curated by Alexander himself – their representation of the entire student body, and how they address the challenging situations some students may be going through. Friday understands the need for books and other resources through which students can build social and emotional learning (SEL) skills. She has seen students draw similarities between their lives and experiences with those who may appear different through materials that feature diverse stories. This helps develop empathy (a key component in SEL) in young people, driving self-awareness and empowerment to contribute to their communities.

With Bookfest, Friday found the books she was looking for. “Bookfest provides a great way for students to feel seen and heard and helps them see how to navigate these tricky situations. It’s also great because these titles act like windows for our students who haven’t been through those situations – it builds empathy for their classmates.”

Moreover, she quickly recognized the skills used during reading and discussions aligned perfectly with the school’s standards. “These titles can be used as read-aloud books and as independent reading books,” Friday said. “The educator’s guides can be used as support either in the classroom or as a discussion guide in a traditional book club model.”

Other benefits of Bookfest are its versatility and flexibility. In fact, Friday split the titles in two different ways: first with her Project LIT Book Club, second in a class focused on independent reading, which culminated with a monthly book project.

The Project LIT Book Club allowed the students to choose the Bookfest title they most wanted to read and gave them a month to finish it. “They loved them so much that almost all the book club students read multiple titles, and most read every book I had before the month was up. They used the discussion questions to talk about each of the books when we met,” Friday said.

The independent reading option also succeeded because she built in time daily for her students to read. “Once a week, on early-release Fridays, they got together with other students who were reading the same book and discussed it. At the end of the month, they had a creative project that also had a written component due that was based on whichever Bookfest book they read,” she said.

For the students, Kwame Alexander Bookfest delivered everything it promised, from helping students see themselves and their place in society reflected in what they read to providing opportunities for them to engage with each other in lively discussions. Additionally, these titles enable students to build connections to those who have other backgrounds. For Friday, it was a victory on multiple fronts. “I liked that I had excellent titles to choose from and was able to mix and match titles, and I loved that the resources were ready for me to use – I didn’t need to create anything to help develop literacy skills and a love of reading with my students.”

Which books will connect with your students?

Grade 3



Grade 4



Grade 5



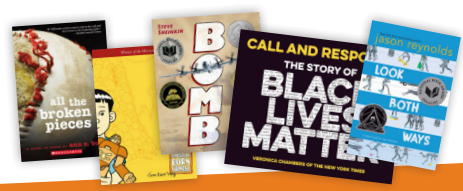
Grade 6



Grade 7



Grade 8



Ready to engage your students in their reading?
Explore Kwame Alexander Bookfest at follettk12.link/w51.