



455 County Street – New Bedford, MA 02740
Superintendent Thomas Anderson

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Arthur Motta
508.997.4511, ext. 14553
amotta@newbedfordschools.org

ESOL Book Club spreads joy of reading aloud

NBPS Division of Adult Education's popular program brings books home for family reading

When Ms. Leta Phillips, an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher of Advanced English Levels 6-7, created the Adult Learning Center's "On the Go Book Club," she had no idea of just how popular it would become. Its purpose was simple: introduce some of the best children's literature to ESOL parents and encourage family engagement. As it turns out, it is also rewarding – even students without children are joining the club for the opportunity it provides to learn some English in a fun, engaging way. Consequently, all ESOL students are invited to join the afternoon club and share their love of reading at home.

The book club is organized into three stages. In the Pre-reading stage, Ms. Phillips concentrates on the new vocabulary words. At this time, the students are given a premade graphic organizer with the new word, a student-friendly definition, a picture, and a column where the student can write a translation into their own language. Students find this exercise a helpful resource when they are rereading the book later on at home. During the second stage, each student is given a book, so they can follow along as the teacher models engaging techniques to capture the listener's attention. During this time, Ms. Phillips asks questions to reinforce reading skills such as: prediction, drawing conclusions, retell, sequencing, etc. In the post-reading stage, students take their own book home to share with their family.

Ms. Phillips notes, "The books that we have read so far are: "Strega Nona" by Tomie dePaulo, "Yeh-Shen" (a Chinese Cinderella story) by Walt Disney, "The Fisherman and his Wife" by the Brothers Grimm, "The Velveteen Rabbit" by Margery Williams, "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" by Beatrix Potter, and "Skin Like Mine" by Latashia M. Perry. These books appeal to the students because they deal with authentic human emotions – love, loneliness, selfishness, respect, self-pride, etc. Moreover, they are multicultural, so the students appreciate that."

Ms. Phillips has expressed pleasant surprise with the genuine interest in the book club and its positive outcomes. Some students have shared their personal experiences in reading the books with their family. Jacqueline Guzman who has a 7-year-old daughter at the Gomes School said that her daughter looks forward to reading a new book with mommy each week. “She corrects my pronunciation of some of the English words. I don’t mind because we are learning together,” she said. Another ESOL student related that she reads the book with her husband, as it is a good way to improve their English together. Still another student prefers to rewrite the book in her notebook. She says that this helps her focus on the words and improves her spelling and writing skills. The Adult Learning Center’s “On the Go Book Club” has been a very rewarding experience for both Ms. Phillips and her students. “The club will continue through the end of the year. Many more journeys into new worlds await us,” she added.

The New Bedford Public Schools Division of Adult & Continuing Education offers classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) as well as classes to prepare for the HiSET/GED Exams, or to earn a high school diploma. Classes are offered mornings and evenings. For more information please contact the Adult Education Information Office at 508-997-4511 Extension 33550/33551, Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. or Monday or Wednesday evenings at 508-997-4511 Extension 21218 between 6:30 p.m. and 8:45 p.m. For more info online: adulthood.newbedfordschools.org.

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PHOTO:

SPRING INTO READING ALOUD – ESOL Instructor Leta Phillips (center, seated) with members of the NBPS Adult Learning Center’s “On the Go Book Club” and their copies of “The Velveteen Rabbit” by Margery Williams. Student members read a selected children’s book after learning its new vocabulary. Ms. Phillips models reading the story, and students bring home their copy of the book to read to their children. A win/win for parents and children alike.

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