

Book club asks kids their opinion of new releases

Kids aged 9 to 14 write book reviews for a newsletter published by the Nine14 Club

By Ben Romano
Higher Education Reporter

Young avid or "would-be avid" readers and writers have a new channel through which to express their opinions about books.

Kids between the ages of 9 and 14 are writing reviews for Nine14 News, a monthly newsletter published by the Nine14 Club. The Nine14 Club is a book club sponsored by the University Bookstore, said Jenine Ward, children's books specialist.

Ward, a senior majoring in sociology, conceived the idea to begin the club and newsletter some time before it came to life this January, she said.

The newsletter fills a number of needs in the community, Ward said. Programs exist for younger and older readers, but the 9-to-14 age group has previously been ignored.

"There is a big gap of potentially really important readers that are neglected," she added.

The club has already grown to more than 200 members. This is evidence of the need for something like this in the community, Ward said.

"Nothing like this has ever happened before," she said. "It has really taken shape a lot faster than I thought it would."

The club is open to anyone who is reading books for the 9-to-14 age group. No affiliation with the University is required. The core group of members is from Eugene, but there are members as far north as Washington and as far south as California, Ward said. Entire classrooms have joined the club in Eugene and California.



Members of the Nine14 Club and the club's creator, Jenine Ward, "talk books" during their first pizza party in the University Bookstore. The pizza party was sponsored in part by Pepsi and Snapple.

All the writing is done by the members. Ward acts as a coordinator and editor of the reviews in newsletter, she said.

Each monthly issue will contain several reviews by kids of all ages.

Eight-year-old Ivan's review of "Dominic," by William Steig, was featured in the April issue.

"I like William Steig because he has a true gift for writing stories," Ivan wrote.

Ivan, who also likes to draw, write comic strips and play sports and games, got involved in the club when his after-school caretaker told him about it.

"It's fun because we have parties and have raffles, and I write for

a newsletter and my review gets read by many people," Ivan said.

The Nine14 Club has benefited Ivan in many ways, said Ivan's mother, Amelia, who is a sixth-grade teacher.

"Writing book reviews is giving him a purpose and an audience to write to, and I think that is one of the best ways to develop as a writer," Amelia said.

Ivan is developing skills such as voice, organization and his ability to communicate, Amelia said. The club also lets him know that reading is important, and it is motivating him to read by demonstrating that it can also be fun, she said.

"He's grown because of it even

in this short time," Amelia said. "Jenine has created a terrific vehicle to encourage reading and writing and combined it with fun stuff like pizza parties and prizes — those are important to kids."

Kids are better critics of kids' books, Ward said.

"If a fifth grader says a book is good for kids in their peer group, that means a lot more than if I say the book is good," she said.

A regular feature in every issue will be "Abby's Angle," a column written by 14-year-old Abby.

Abby enjoys writing for the club because "I get to read a lot of books, and now I'm kind of famous — I didn't think I'd get this

famous — and because it's fun to be a part of something so important," she said.

When she is not writing for Nine14, Abby is practicing violin or working on her own small business. She said she wants to be an actress, an author or a violinist.

The club is set up like the Public Broadcasting System show "Reading Rainbow," Ward said. Members are given an opportunity to review books they like.

"It's an opportunity for kids to not only have an audience and an opinion that matters, but to also be able to read critically and write critically about what they are interested in," Ward said.

A lot of kids have been excited about the program for a number of reasons, Ward said. Their opinions matter, and it gives them encouragement to read.

"Once you facilitate their interest and get them into reading what they'd like to or what they can relate to, it's even more amazing than television because they are using their own imagination," she said.

The club is absolutely free to members. Funding has come from the bookstore's general budget. It has been necessary to have the support of the [bookstore] management, Ward said.

"The funding is kind of not really there right now, but we are working on avenues," she said.

For the future, the club plans to conduct a survey of its members to find the all-time top-10 greatest children's books. The club also plans to publish interviews with authors and have some authors speak at quarterly pizza parties.

Ward is looking for volunteers to help with the club, especially with the club's Web page, she said. For more information on volunteering or to join the club, call Ward at 346-4331, ext. 234.

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