

From NextBook’s Let’s Talk about it to Oakton Reads: Jewish Literature Discussion Groups in a Community College Setting

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Description: As a recipient of the Nextbook/ALA “Let’s Talk about It” grant in 2007, Oakton Community College offered its first Jewish book series. When the program ended in 2009, the library decided to continue the series by getting grant funding through Oakton’s Educational Foundation. Learn about the evolution of this program and how it has become so successful.

Debbie Feder is currently the Director of the Learning Commons at Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Chicago and the Member Relations Chair for AJL. She has her Masters in Library and Information Science from Dominican University. She has spent more than ten years introducing children and young adults to literature and information literacy at schools and public libraries. She is the author of *Jelly Bean’s Art Museum Adventure* and is honored to be a member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee.

Rose Novil currently is a Professor of Library Services and Coordinator of the Skokie Campus Library at Oakton Community College, Skokie, IL. She has a MLIS from University of Illinois and a MLS from Lake Forest College.

Introductions

Slide 1—Presentation Title

Slide 2 and 3:

CHAPTER 1—The History:

In 2004, ALA partnered with Nextbook to fund grants to promote reading of Jewish literature and they called them “Let’s Talk about it: Jewish Literature.” This was a “national initiative to promote books that illuminate 3,000 years of Jewish civilization” and to bring stories about Jews and Jewish culture to communities throughout the United States.

Libraries awarded the grants were required to promote and present 5 FREE discussions led by a local scholar based on six themes.

In 2006, Oakton applied for one of these grants and received \$2500 to hire the scholar, purchase the books and promote the series. We received another grant in 2008 when the last round of grants was offered. This time, we partnered with the Skokie Public Library which was a great experience.

All in all, these Jewish literature grants were awarded to more than 330 libraries all over the country.

- Cool point was that participating libraries when completing the series would share their multiple copies of books with other libraries by either giving them away or charging a small amount.

Moving forward, without outside funding, we applied internally to the Oakton Educational Foundation for money to continue what we were observing to be a very popular series amongst our community college members.

This money paid for the books, the discussion leaders, advertising and of course, FOOD.

From 2010-2014, we received these institutional grants and in 2015 we decided to fund the series through the library budget.

- With less funds, we decided to no longer give the books to the participants but would encourage them to get them through libraries, online etc. We were also running out of room in the library to house multiple copies of the books. We got some resistance, but since the discussions were free, most accepted the changes.

SLIDE 4

CHAPTER 2---ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

Oakton has an advertising department which helps us create flyers and we also advertise through the college course catalogs which are delivered throughout the district to every home. Participants know to look for the series offered in the spring every year.

We also have an online presence through our OAKTON READS LIBGUIDE which we refer people to.

SLIDE 5

CHAPTER 3--SCHOLARS AND FACILITATORS

The grant stipulated that we hire scholars and our first 2 presenters were Jewish scholars getting doctorates from the University of Chicago.

Their focus was very much on the “Jewishness” of the books.

The next group of facilitators turned out to be English Professors who are brilliant discussion leaders, but not Jewish scholars, but who happened to be Jewish. Ben Goluboff from Lake Forest College stayed with us for 5 years. When Ben decided to no longer do the series, Debbie and I decided to try something different by having 3 different facilitators, Josh and Davis from Lake Forest College and Elana who actually teaches at Oakton. Each one brought their own strengths to the discussions and the participants seemed to them all. All interested in returning next year—we are still discussing what we want to do.

SLIDE 6

CHAPTER 4—Food and Room set-up

Oakton has 2 campuses—the larger one in DesPlaines and the smaller one in Skokie. Since has a large Jewish population it proved to be a perfect venue for the programs.

And of course, Feed them and the will come! Here’s what the room looked like this semester!

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