

Library Videographers Use Vodcasting to Promote William Allen White Nominees

by Robin Clark, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library

Traditionally, William Allen White book award nominee book talks have been performed annually in person by Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library (TSCPL) staff at local area schools. In November 2006, after presenting nineteen of their thirty-five minute programs in three days, Robin Clark and Janet Pionkowski looked at each other and said hoarsely, “This is crazy; we should be taping this so that we don’t have to do it over and over again for each class....”



Puppet Presents Princess Academy

Fast forward five months later to the Mountain Plains Library Association (MPLA) conference in April 2007, where Robin and her supervisor attended a workshop on vodcasting. The workshop presenters asked how those in the audience might use vodcasting in their own library to increase literacy. Robin flashed back (post-traumatic-stressfully) to the November 2006 presentations and remembered how impossible it was to reach all the students in the Topeka area in person. She didn’t hesitate to raise her hand and state that she would use vodcasting to promote the state’s children and young adult book award nominees. This would not only save staff time, but allow many more youth across the state to have access to the book talks through the use of screen technology and RSS feeds.

After that spark of an idea at MPLA, Robin returned home to TSCPL and received permission from her supervisor to go forward with another colleague, Sandy Lane, to develop a William Allen White award nominee book vodcasting project. This was a true collaborative library project, with bookmobile staff (who hosted the project through their Kansas Connections school program service), digital services, youth services, and maintenance (providing “movie lights” and a backdrop for the recording studio) in on the excitement.

It was decided early on that the youth themselves should “do” the vodcasts – with the thought that it would be more enjoyable for students to watch someone their own age review and rate the

books, rather than librarians. Youth would entice other youth to read the nominees. Identifying a pool of willing students was difficult at first – until Robin targeted and collaborated with the gifted program students at Topeka USD 501. These students, supported by their teachers, wrote and performed highly creative videos that were recorded and uploaded on Youtube®. The videos included book interviews from “The Dr. Dyl Show” (a take-off on Dr. Phil), several inanimate object book reviewers (aka puppeteers), masked anonymous book reviewers, and one with exceptional headgear (the Hat Girl).

Once the videos were recorded, Robin and Sandy edited them to get just the right look for Youtube®. Then the videos were uploaded to Youtube® and Teachertube® for viewing. Since the overall goal of the project was to increase literacy through the use of screen technology by reaching the youth where they were culturally most familiar, links to the Youtube® videos were placed on the TSCPL website and sent to local, state, regional and national library list serves, the WAW official website, online library newsletters and blogs. Individual e-mails containing the links were sent to Topeka area school media specialists highlighting the WAW project and suggesting they make the links available to their students on their media webpage.

Robin and Sandy’s hope is that as students statewide view these peer-produced video reviews, they will be more interested in reading the nominees and better prepared to vote by April 15, the end date for selection of the William Allen White award for 2008. They also hope that Kansas youth will become more familiar with the William Allen White award and will, in turn, look forward to reading next year’s nominees, spawning even more video reviews. Plans are already under way at TSCPL to record reviews of next year’s nominees for posting to Youtube®.

Here is the link to the library Youtube® channel where you can watch all of the WAW videos - <http://www.youtube.com/topekalibrary> - you may have to scroll through them to find the six William Allen White videos. Enjoy – and let us know what you think – comments are welcome!