Challenge Accepted!

By Jeannie Standal

Winter reading challenges are very popular, and reading keeps students engaged in learning! Recreational reading, even over a short break, reduces learning loss that can occur while the kids are not in school. This winter break, how about working with your school librarian to throw together a winter reading challenge? The two of you can coordinate a quick, low-effort program to make sure students are going home with books that will get them to their challenge goals! There are lots of formats and ways to get kids interested—here are a few ideas:

1. Create a Bingo card challenge with a different reading task in each square. Remember, the bingo card doesn’t have to be 5x5—winter break is short and busy, so it can be tough to get five books read. A 3x3 card could work, with some newspaper or magazine articles and audiobooks thrown in, too. Make the free square something fun and easy like recommending a book to a friend or finding out what a family member is reading. Check out Yakima Valley Libraries’ card for inspiration.

2. Level the playing field between those who read a few big books and those who read lots of small books, or those who read quickly and those who read slowly, by counting pages or minutes read rather than books read.

3. Challenge students to read one book with a certain requirement like a Newberry winner, a book set in a place you are visiting or would like to visit over the break, or main character is not your gender… you get the idea. See how many different books meeting the requirement are read over the break.

4. The challenge can be Goodreads-style where students set their own goals for how many books to read over the break.

5. Let the class work together toward a reading goal for a group reward. It is astounding what students will do for pizza.

6. And for you, dear teachers, a reading challenge of your own! Perhaps a “one for you and one for me” approach would be fun. Read one book you want to read, and another that your students might read. If the break is too stuffed with activities (sleeping is a totally valid winter break activity), challenge yourself to read a certain quantity of books in 2018!

A reading challenge should be fun and low-stakes, not an assignment. So no grades, no comprehension tests, no book reports. Just a good time.