

Matt Christopher Group Discussion



At a Glance

GRADE LEVEL:	Grades 3-4 (Intermediate)
INSTRUCTOR:	Franki Sibberson
VIDEO LENGTH:	5:32
RELATED TEXT:	<i>Beyond Matt Christopher</i> by Franki Sibberson
RELATED TOPICS:	student-led book talks; series books; speaking and listening
COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS:	

SL.4.4. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

Video Summary

In this video, two boys share other books beyond Matt Christopher that might interest their three classmates. The boys report on the books and describe components that are important to them.

Discussion Questions

What other series might encourage a “Beyond...” book talk like this?

What do you notice about what the boys highlight as they ‘sell’ the books? What might a teacher do to prepare students for a group like this?

The other boys sit silently as they listen. Would this work in your classroom, or would you want them to more actively participate in the discussion? If so, what might you do to encourage more participation?

Matt Christopher Group Discussion

Planning for Professional Development

- 5 min Welcome participants. Invite educators to list all the series that kids are reading right now. Once those readers grow weary of the series or finish it, they may want to go beyond.
- 10 min Distribute *Beyond Matt Christopher* to participants. Have them read and annotate independently. Discuss the piece.
- 10 min View the video, and then discuss using the focus questions:
- ▶ *What other series might encourage a “Beyond...” book talk like this?*
 - ▶ *What do you notice about what the boys highlight as they ‘sell’ the books? What might a teacher do to prepare students for a group like this?*
 - ▶ *The other boys sit silently as they listen. Would this work in your classroom or would you want them to more actively participate in the discussion? If so, what might you do to encourage more participation?*
- 5 min Close with a quote from Franki: “My role is to find books and to offer them to the students who have already fallen in love with Matt Christopher's novels.” What tips do the participants have about helping kids fall in love with books?

Total Time: 30 minutes

Beyond Matt Christopher (BOOKLIST)

by Franki Sibberson

Thank goodness for Matt Christopher! I can't imagine how many boys are avid readers because of his books. Every year, I have readers, mostly boys, who become obsessed with reading the great sports novels by this author.

Over the last several years, I have tried to find books by other authors that these same readers could enjoy-- books to stretch their lives as readers, building on their love of sports reading. I have watched these readers over the years, and eventually, they decide to move on from Matt Christopher. But they never give up Matt Christopher completely. Instead, they read sports books in other genres and by other authors, always going back to a Matt Christopher title now and then.

As a teacher of these readers each year, I want to make sure that I support this obsession with other series books. I know that finding a series that hooks you like this is a huge milestone in a reader's life. I certainly don't want them to abandon Matt Christopher. However, I want them to know what loving Matt Christopher books might tell them about themselves as a reader. And I want them to know all of the possibilities--that as a reader, Matt Christopher may always be their favorite author, but enjoy books about sports can mean reading a variety of topics, genres and authors.

So, for those students who love Matt Christopher books, here are some other titles that many of them have eventually enjoyed.

Mike Lupica is a great author for Matt Christopher readers. Some of his books, such as **Heat** and **Summer Ball**, are a bit more difficult than many of the books by Christopher. However, since most of these students have a strong background knowledge of sports terms, these books are great next steps for them. Lupica recently introduced a new series called *Comeback Kids* that seems a bit closer in level and depth to the Matt Christopher novels. Currently, there are two books available in this series--**Two-Minute Drill** and **Hot Hand**.

Sports Fantasy is another way to move students to a new, challenging type of reading. Dan Gutman has written several sports fantasies in his Baseball Card Adventure Series. This series includes the books **Mickey and Me**, **Shoeless Joe and Me**, **Jackie and Me**, **Babe and Me** and others. In each of these books, the characters travel back to the time of a famous baseball player. These books have wonderful plots, with lots of adventure.

The Barnstormer Series is a new series by Phil Bildner and illustrated by Loren Long. It is set in the late 1800s and is centered on a mysterious baseball. The book is a great size for readers wanting to stretch themselves--short enough so as not to be intimidating, yet with enough depth, history, and plot to stretch readers' thinking.

The Million Dollar Shot, The Million Dollar Kick, The Million Dollar Strike, and The Million Dollar Putt are books by Dan Gutman that hook most readers of sports fiction. Each of these books tells the story of a child who has a chance to win a million dollars by accomplishing the title event. Fun plots with lots of action make this a popular series.

Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time by Lisa Yee is less about sports than about this character who was introduced in Yee's first book **Millicent Min, Girl Genius**. It is a little more challenging than Matt Christopher's novels, and intended for a bit of an older audience. Although Stanford Wong wants to attend a summer basketball camp, he will be attending summer school instead, due to his grades.

Crash is a great first Jerry Spinelli read for sports fans. **Crash** tells the story of two boys--an athlete who spends much of his time bullying his neighbor, Penn Webb. The story follows the two through the years as they both grow and change. Because of the sports hook, many sports readers begin to read other Jerry Spinelli books after reading **Crash**.

Nonfiction Book Connections

I have recently added several nonfiction sports titles to my classroom library. These books help Matt Christopher fans extend their sports reading to nonfiction text. **Balls!** by Michael J. Rosen has been such a hit, that a second book, **Balls! Round 2** is due out in February. These books are filled with great nonfiction facts about sports balls--the ways they are made, interesting trivia and more. **Hey, Batta Batta Swing!: The Wild Old Days of Baseball** by Sally Cook and James Charlton is a long nonfiction picture book, and one that readers can enjoy from front to back. The book shares many stories from baseball's history in a narrative form. The text is accompanied by great illustrations, and has embedded baseball vocabulary.

I've also picked up several picture book biographies about famous athletes from history. By having several about one person or event, students can build the knowledge about the history of sports and think about ways different authors tell stories about people. **Satchel Paige** by Lesa Cline-Ransome and **Satchel Paige: Don't Look Back** by David Adler are two picture books about this player. **Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow** by James Sturm and Rich Tommaso is a new graphic novel about this important era in baseball history. A bit of background knowledge is needed to make sense of the story but for students familiar with the Satchel Paige story, this is a great book to introduce graphic novels to sports readers.

I am thrilled at what falling in love with Matt Christopher books can do for readers in grades 3-6. It opens the doors for them into the wide range of sports writing available to them as readers. My role is to find these books and to offer them to the students who have already fallen in love with Matt Christopher's novels.