Riverton library program a 'shoe-in'

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Students urged to get right fit when picking books to read

If the book fits, read it. Carla Brown, Riverton Elementary School's librarian, believes that and she had an interesting way of illustrating that idea to her students.

Brown recently had shoes of every size and description hanging from the ceiling of Riverton's library - red flip flops, funky black tennis shoes with white stripes and hot pink laces, demure patent leather dress-up shoes. Her message was to pick a book as you pick your shoes, according to fit and occasion.

If you're just having fun, kind of like lying around on the beach, an easier read, like a flip-flop sandal, feels good. If you're trying to get information on a subject, a serious nonfiction book, like a sturdy boot, would be best.

"Sometimes you go barefoot," Brown said. "That's when you make up your own stories."

Brown is a former classroom teacher and knows children will sometimes choose books to meet their Accelerated Reader goals when the books don't really fit their abilities. When the books are too easy, kids rack up points toward their AR goal but they aren't challenged.

When the books are too hard, students can get discouraged or do poorly on the test they take about the book because they didn't really understand what they were reading.

"When I was a kid, I liked to wear my mom's shoes, but they were too big for me," Brown said.

Delvon Tuck has made that mistake. "Last year, I just looked at the points" toward his AR goal he would get for reading a book, the fifth-grader said. "I wanted to make these points even if I didn't understand" the book.

This year, he's making better choices, and he's enjoying reading.

"When I go to my room, I blank myself out," Delvon said. "There's nothing else but just me and my book."

Brown got the idea for comparing shoes and books from Riverton teacher Robyn Brumlow, who had seen the comparison on the Internet. "When she said that, I just thought 'hmmm,'" Brown said. She went to a thrift store and spent $50 on dozens of shoes she hung from the library ceiling.

After 13 years in the classroom, Brown thinks like a teacher and sees the library as her new classroom where she's trying to find "creative ways to connect kids to an idea."

Zachary Prueger got the shoe message, saying that easy books are like slippers, reading hard books is like putting on a boot and picking a book on your level is like wearing tennis shoes, which can get you where you need to go.

"She's really inspired me a lot more," said Zachary, who likes to read Hardy Boys books and "mysteries with a happy ending."

Justin Shepperson loved "Where the Red Fern Grows," a book that felt like "wearing a a boot on one foot and a tennis shoe on the other," he said. "It was a very long, thick book, or a boot. I still read through it and it was one of the best books I read in my whole life."

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