

Students Share Love of Books on Shelfari

Throughout the day at Van Meter School, I listen to our students and teachers talk about the books they are reading. I hear them share favorite characters, compare books to others they have read, and suggest new titles to friends and colleagues. Within the walls of the library and classrooms, our students have developed communities where they can talk books. But what about outside of these walls?

A variety of social networking tools are available to extend students' love of reading and books. These technology tools enhance learning and make it easy for students to collaborate with peers and global audiences. My favorite is Shelfari, a free social network where users can create a virtual bookshelf to show what they have read, see what friends are reading, and, in doing so, discover books they want to read through collaboration with others in their network.

Several characteristics make Shelfari stand out from similar tools. Shelfari members can add "friends" to their network and create or join "groups" that interest them. They can rate and review books on their shelves and share them with their friends. Students can personalize their shelves by designing beautiful covers and labeling them with "Read it," "Plans to read," or "Is reading now." Members can even show off their shelves with a Shelfari widget on a blog or website.

Shelfari is an excellent tool for the classroom because it allows students to share their passion for their favorite books and authors, which not only helps them develop a love of reading but also builds communication skills. Teachers can create groups for particular classes or specific lessons and use them as an online book club.

One of my favorite uses of Shelfari occurred when I teamed up with secondary English teacher Shawn Hyer from my Iowa school and Nick Provenzano, an English teacher from Grosse Pointe South High School in Detroit, 500 miles away. Together we created the #VMGSP Shelfari Group to give our students a chance to connect, share, and become part of a very special virtual space.

Although the students live hundreds of miles apart, they have created meaningful relationships using this safe social network to share their love of reading with others.

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