

WHAT IS THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS?

The Battle of the Books is a statewide Alaskan reading motivation and comprehension program sponsored by the Alaska Association of School Librarians. The goals of the program are to encourage and recognize students who enjoy reading, broaden reading interests, increase reading comprehension, and promote academic excellence.

Lists of books are chosen and questions are written for all grade levels. Students read the books, discuss them, quiz each other on the contents, and then compete in teams of not more than three students to correctly answer questions based on the books in a "quiz show" format. Questions begin with the words "In which book..." so that the answer will always be a title and author. Teams may participate at the local, district and state levels of competition - with the exception of K-2 students whose competition goes only through the district level.

New lists of recommended titles for each level are compiled each year by a committee of librarians and teachers based on the "Criteria for the Selection of Titles" in Appendix A. An attempt is made to vary the titles chosen according to genre and difficulty so that readers may encounter a broad range of books. At the annual AkLA conference, the official booklist for state competition for the following year is set so that planning to obtain the titles can begin.

The statewide program involves a cooperative effort by many local groups. It is popular with students and has provided new opportunities for academic competition. Battle of the Books has also proven effective in its specified purpose - to stimulate an interest in reading.

THE HISTORY OF BATTLE OF THE BOOKS IN ALASKA

The original idea for Battle of the Books came from a radio program sponsored by the Chicago Public Library in the early 1940's. Joanne Kelly, a student participant in the radio show, became a school librarian in Urbana, Illinois. While she was there, she reconstructed the radio show from memory for use in her library.

Many years later another Chicago area school librarian, Roslyn Goodman, found her way to Kodiak, Alaska, bringing the Battle of the Books idea with her. She used it in Kodiak in the 1981-1982 school year and word of the program spread. In 1982-1983, Hermon Hutchens School in Valdez received a Merit Award from the Department of Education for their Battle of the Books program and Battle of the Books soon spread to Anchorage, Fairbanks, Valdez, Tok and Northway. Winning teams from Northway and Tok participated in an interschool audio-conference Battle.

Thanks to Linda Barrett's (Anchorage School District) suggestion to hold inter-school and inter-district Battles via audio-conference equipment and Pat Thurman's (Fairbanks North Star Borough S.D.) enthusiasm and organizational efforts to promote a statewide program, librarians from Dillingham, Kodiak, Valdez, Tok and Fairbanks met via audio-conference on May 19, 1983 to make plans for Alaska's first statewide audio-conference competition. Fourteen school districts around Alaska participated in the program in April 1984. By 1984-1985, twenty-six districts were involved in the program. In 1988-89 there were fifty-one Alaskan districts participating and several out-of-state districts requested Battle of the Books packets. Although the number of participating districts varies from year to year, overall interest in this exciting program remains high.