

VIDEO CONFERENCING @ your library™

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York Region District School Board's mission is to inspire and prepare learners for life in our changing world community. Advanced Broadband Enabled Learning (ABEL) is a board initiative that truly supports this mission. Through this partnership with industry leaders in educational technologies, teachers and students are provided the opportunity to use many different elearning tools.

Video conferencing tools are just some of the many different collaborative etools available to teachers in our school district. I have been using video conferencing tools for many different purposes in school libraries with great success.

What is needed is a high speed broadband connection to the Internet, video conferencing software, a computer with a high speed processor and a Web cam. If these terms speak to your inner geek, then you know what to do... if they don't, contact your school district IT department and seek their support and advice. With access to this type of hardware, you can conduct a video conference.

There are many benefits to using video conferencing in any classroom. Bringing experts from far afield and across time zones into the library classroom environment is a great way to enhance any curriculum. Allowing smaller groups of students to have greater interaction with these experts ensures that your audience is engaged in the virtual discussion. Using video conferencing technology allows teachers to have in-school field trips more frequently, with fewer disruptions to the school day and they are generally more cost efficient.

I was looking to use video conferencing as a means to enhance my White Pine Reading Club. Newmarket High School is a very busy school that offers many different co-curricular programs. In order to encourage students to read the nominated titles and enjoy discussing them for pleasure, I felt I needed to offer something extra to keep them coming! On a whim I decided to contact all of the White Pine nominees, explain my idea and see what came of it. I was thrilled to receive responses from five adventurous authors!

As of the writing of this article we will have had three video conferences with a goal of five before we vote for the White Pine Award. Don Aker, author of *The Space In Between* was our first conference, Lesley Choyce author of *The End of the World as We Know It*, our second, followed by Susan Juby author of *Another Kind of Cowboy*. The authors generally do a short reading from the nominated title and then engage in discussion with the students. The video conferences are never longer than one hour. The students have loved the experience, I have attracted a few boys to our reading club (no small feat with so many other choices of activities) and the authors have been thrilled to be a part of an interesting and innovative activity that connects them to their readers and pushes them to explore a new technology.

The addition of this elearning tool has provided our White Pine readers with a focus to read specific titles in order to be informed for the discussions with the authors; many of the students have made the effort to read additional titles by the same author to be even better prepared. Personally, I feel the use of video conferencing between students and authors has created a dynamic environment for the White Pine reading program at Newmarket High School. The White Pine readers are truly engaged in an activity that models active reading and literate discussion and connects our students to the greater community through the use of technology. □

For more information about the ABEL initiative visit: www.abelearn.ca

