

# PASCO READS LITERACY PROJECT

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## PASCO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

**T**ea and cookies set the tone for the Pasco Reads Literacy Project. Calm and serious, but definitely enjoyable, the project took literacy projects to a new level—high school.

The literacy project was an out-of-classroom experience aimed at getting high school students together with adults—teachers, parents and community residents—to read and discuss a novel. The students were equal partners in the discussions, held at various locations, such as the public library or a community coffee house.

Pasco Reads began with the novel *Bless Me Ultima*, written by Rudolph Anaya. The two English teachers who chaired the project chose this book because it involves a young boy growing up in a Hispanic family in New Mexico. The teachers thought the book would be particularly relevant because Pasco has a large Hispanic population, and because the book deals with reconciling cultural differences in and among people.

The reading group decided how much of the book it would finish before each meeting. The teachers devised discussion questions and led the sessions. “Because true learning is taking experiences the author has written about and applying them to one’s own life, we set aside time to really listen to each other and how we connected with the story of the characters,” said the teachers.

Students who, usually, did not like to read, along with those who loved to do so, participated in the voluntary project. All of the students found the book easy to read, yet challenging, depending on how deeply they delved into the themes and analyses. “Working with teachers outside of a classroom builds a relationship. Teachers can be seen learning with students, which is very powerful,” the co-chairs said. Not every reader attended each discussion, but the leaders were careful to keep them abreast of discussions and points of interest. When the group finished the book, there was a gathering to wrap up ideas and to celebrate the group’s success.

The public library and the local Barnes & Noble Booksellers ordered the book and promoted the reading project, as did the high school library. The book store dedicated shelf space to book by Anaya and to various study guides in English and Spanish. The library ensured that students and families who could not afford to buy the book had copies to borrow.

Teachers and parents publicized the project, with some teachers offering extra credit to students who participated. Parents distributed fliers to local grocery and book stores and to coffee houses.

Students were not the only ones to benefit. The adults used it to network, to meet new people, to hang out with their students, and socialize in a nonacademic setting. The organizers felt the project was a success because it encouraged independent reading and good literacy habits. Next year’s plans include a blog and more advanced reading work.

Type 6

READING

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