

Same but different: Lit Week 2020

By Claire Gibson

Snapshot

Claire Gibson, from St Joseph's College in Echuca, outlines their *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est.*

Book Week is key to creating enthusiasm and enjoyment around reading, showcasing the best books through the CBCA Awards list, and creating opportunity for celebration around books and reading.

Since starting at St. Joseph's College, Echuca, in 2017, I embraced Book Week and the Book Week theme to seek to achieve those goals with our secondary school students. St. Joseph's is years 7-12, with 953 students.

2020 brought many challenges and opportunities to introduce change. The challenge of supporting young adult health and wellbeing at this time focussed our thinking on creating a new event held at the same time as Book Week but solely for young adults; an event that included our students, our staff, our families and our community in an enjoyable experience that involved reading and learning, but also created a positive vibe around our College for everyone.

Book Week was the launchpad in our thinking process. We decided to take the successful concept and practice of Book Week further to be specifically tailored for young adults in our secondary school.

To meet this brief, we started with choosing a name. Students knew Book Week from primary school. We wanted to make the secondary school version different. To do this we picked a word with common slang usage but also with reference to literature and literacy, that raised questions for learning conversations between staff and students - Lit. So Lit Week 2020 was conceptualized.

Then we sought to pick a theme. We wanted the theme to pique interest, be quirky, be young-adult, and raise the bar for learning conversations. And look good on a T-shirt (I'll get to that later). We consulted our resident Latin experts - how lucky we are to have them! - and came up with the Latin translation (or as close as possible) for "Reading is Life" - Lectio Vita Est.

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Next we called on our staff to be on the Crew (not the committee) for *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est.* Ten staff members put up their hand, from the English,

Design, Woodwork, Koori Support, Visual Arts, Italian, Learning Enhancement and Library. This was extraordinary. Everyone was tired, everyone was overwhelmed, everyone had a lot on their plate both professionally and personally in 2020. For this many staff members to volunteer to be part of the Crew was indeed extraordinary.

From a single Zoom meeting we confirmed the name of the week and the theme, came up with a provisional program of events, confirmed the production of a *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est* T-shirt for Crew, Emissaries, for sale (\$15) and for prizes, and made a new date to meet for our next and final meeting, on the Tuesday before *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est*.

The T-shirt was our key marketing tool leading up and during *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est*.

Our talented Visual Arts teacher came up with a design for a T-shirt that we tested for popularity not on adults but on our students. Their feedback led to small changes and the result was a T-shirt that featured the theme and a funky retro graphic. Crew and Emissaries wore the T-shirt to school in the week leading up to *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est*. It was a hit, not only because it looked good and felt good to wear but it created awareness and conversations around Lit Week 2020, the origins of language, literacy, and reading.

Students from our EAL classes were asking what the T-shirt was about and what it meant. Conversations sprang up out of curiosity.

But it got better.

From a single Zoom meeting the call went out for volunteer staff members to serve as Emissaries (not ambassadors), a word chosen to spark curiosity and learning conversations.

Again, incredibly, we got 20 staff members who volunteered from across the College - front office staff, maintenance staff, trainees, Learning Enhancement staff, and staff members from the Fashion, Drama, Physical Education and English departments.

Emissaries had just four tasks:

1. Wear the T-shirt
2. Complete a short video on Photo Booth of them talking about whatever they wanted to talk about in relation to their own reading journey and views on reading.
3. Agree to have their picture together with a quote from their video displayed on posters around the College.
4. Have real conversations about reading, literacy, and learning with as many students, colleagues and parents/carers as possible.

These were four powerful and very real tasks that had an impact on students, because they created interest and connection.

Some of you may be thinking 'We couldn't afford to buy and print T-shirts'. Our T-shirts cost us under \$7 to produce and we sold them for \$15 each, meaning for every T-shirt we sold we covered the cost of two. This meant we could afford to give T-shirts away as prizes for the various competitions we ran during *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est*.

So, by the start of *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est* we had created interest and curiosity, created opportunity for real conversations about reading and literacy, raised the profile of reading and literacy within the College, and promised fun to come.

Here is a brief summary of the things we did during *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est*:

- Our English Teacher Crew member devised a detailed **Lesson Plan** for a single Reading Room period around six activities where students chose which of the six they would like to complete.
- Our Wood Teacher created the Book Stack Relay Perpetual House Shield for the winner of the **Book Stack Relay**. This Relay was enormous fun and placegetters were awarded House points.
- **Famous First Lines** on Daily Messages where individual students or entire Learning Mentor classes decided on which book the line came from and submitted their response to the Library.
- **Where's the Lit Week Banner** - a quilted banner with the Lit Week theme was hung in a different spot each day in the outdoor areas of the College and students were asked to find it.
- **Guess the Book in a Bag** from the blurb printed on the front of the bag
- **Book Gardens**, where succulents were planted in books
- **Book Trailer** competition where students made a trailer about a book they had read.
- **Book Pots**, where terracotta pots were covered in book quotes and filled with succulents
- **Book Treasures** featuring a display of old and quirky books which we invited students to hold and discover.
- Paper mache **book key rings** featuring a quote about reading
- **CBCA Book Award** display.
- **Book Tower** where students had to build a jenga-like book tower from (weeded) books.
- **T-shirt sales** with a display in the Library and front office.

In each case students were asked to email their competition answers to the College Library.

Planning for *Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est.* was especially challenging because day-by-day, like everyone else, we didn't know what conditions or COVID restrictions might be placed on anything we tried to organise. Our view was to keep things as simple as possible, organise away, and modify whatever we had to when/if situations or restrictions arose. This worked well.

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As we organised events and talked about what was happening in staff briefings, we repeated the message to staff that if they only did one thing for Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est, make it to have one real conversation with a student, a colleague or a parent/carer about the importance of reading and literacy.

Lit Week 2020 - Lectio Vita Est went well and received support and enthusiasm from our staff and Leadership.

When it was over, we asked for feedback on what worked and what we could do differently.

Already we are planning for Lit Week 2021. One of the key options is to extend the lead-up to the Week and devise creative reading and literacy options to link curriculum outcomes to Lit Week activities and projects.

Claire Gibson is the Librarian at St. Joseph's College, Echuca. She can be contacted at cgibson@sje.vic.edu.au