Book tasting in the classroom: a free kit with a menu and placemats

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How to run a book tasting in the classroom, with a free kit: a café menu, placemats, tasting notes, table signs and six free books for each table by age.

A book tasting turns the classroom into a café where the dishes are books: each table holds one kind of book, readers spend about ten minutes at a table sampling, and they leave with a list of books they want to read in full. It works because choosing is the hard part. A child who has held, opened and read five minutes of six different books knows what they want next. Peabody's book tasting kit prints everything for it, free, like the rest of Peabody through the end of 2026.

The five sheets

- The menu: three courses for every table. To start, the cover and the first page; the main course, five minutes of reading; dessert, a rating on the tasting notes.
- A placemat for each seat, with a place for the book and four reminders: look at the cover, read the first page, five minutes, rate it.
- Tasting notes for each reader: eight rows for the books they taste, with stars to circle and a box to tick for the ones they want to read all the way through.
- Table signs, folded to stand: funny books, true books, animal stories, adventure and mystery, fairy tales and fables, myths and legends.
- The tables' book lists: six of Peabody's free stories of each kind, picked for the age you choose (5 to 7, 8 to 10, or 11 and up).

One button prints the whole kit for an age. Each sheet also prints on its own.

Setting the tables

Six tables, one kind each, with the sign standing up and six books on it. Mix in your own shelf's books: the lists are a starting point, and a tasting is better with real covers. If you're short of copies, a tablet open to a Peabody story is a book on the table; every story on the lists is free to read in the library.

A tablecloth, a fake flower and a bell to ring for the next course cost almost nothing and make the morning feel like an event. Some teachers add a "waiter" (a helper who brings a spare book when a table runs dry) and a chalkboard "today's special" with one book they love.

Running it

1. Give every reader a placemat and their tasting notes.
2. Start everyone at a table. Ring the bell.
3. About ten minutes a table: the cover, five minutes of reading, a rating.
4. Ring again and move. Six tables take an hour with the moves.
5. At the end, every reader picks one book from their ticks to read in full.

After the tasting

The tasting notes are a reading list in the child's own hand. Send them home, or keep them in reading folders and come back to them when a reader can't find a book. A child who ticked three adventure books has told you what to put in their hands next.

A tasting also makes a good first meeting for a book club: everyone picks a book from their ticks, and the club's first conversation is about why they chose it. The any-book club kit has questions that work for any book.

Questions teachers ask

How young can a book tasting go?

Five-year-olds can taste with a grown-up at each table reading the first pages aloud. Shorten the course to five minutes and use pictures on the tasting notes.

What if a child likes nothing?

That's useful too. Ask which table was the least bad and why, and look for that kind of book next. The table signs make it easy to say "more like this".

Can a library run one?

Yes, with families as well as classes. Set the tables in the children's section and print the tasting notes as take-home lists.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/book-tasting-in-the-classroom