

Book Club Kit

This kit is designed to assist in the establishment and running of book clubs.

Courtesy Redland Library

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Establishing a Book Club

This is useful information for people thinking about starting a new Book Club. It outlines preparation and program for a first meeting, highlighting issues each group should consider.

Starting a Group

The easiest way to start a reading group is to phone a friend! Call or e-mail one or two friends who share your love of books and suggest you read one together. Pick a book you think you'll all enjoy and set up a date to discuss it. If each of you brings a friend to the next meeting, soon you'll have a regular group going!

If you can't find friends who are interested in a reading group, try suggesting it to co-workers or other parents at your child's school. You could also put up a notice on the bulletin board at your church or gym. Online reading groups often grow out of chat room groups, bulletin board posters, or members of an e-mail mailing list. Anywhere that people meet and talk is a place to consider looking for reading group members.

Remember, a good mix of people will provide lively, comfortable and fun discussions. Different opinions and styles should be sought and encouraged - if the members of the group or the books themselves are too similar the collective responses may be limited and, over time members may become disinterested.

Source: www.readinggroupguides.com/roundtable/start.asp

Preparation for the First Meeting

- Consider an appropriate location. Speak to a member of library staff to enquire about booking one of our meeting rooms (Not all Clarence Regional Library branches have these). Other options can be cafes, a book group member's house or a park.
- When inviting people to attend the first meeting, ask them to bring along a book they have read recently.
- Ensure you have a supply of name labels for people to display as they arrive.
- Consider the provision of tea and coffee.

Running the First Meeting

At your first meeting, you should consider discussing the following issues:

- **What is a Book Club?**

Discuss the aim of the group.

- **“Getting to Know You”**

Ask each person to talk about the book they have brought with them, or have read recently. This activity will also provide people with an idea of what a book club does and allows people to get to know each other. It will also lead to a discussion of reading likes and dislikes.

Decisions

At the initial meeting the group as a whole can consider and refine the following points:

- **Regularity of Meetings**

How often would members like to meet? Monthly meetings are recommended.

- **Time & Duration of Meetings**

What time should the group start and finish? This may be determined by availability of your chosen venue. It is recommended that your group allows 1½ hours for the meeting.

- **Meeting Venue**

The group needs to decide on a venue in which to meet regularly. Convenience and cost of the venue should be considered.

- **Reading – What Books?**

Book Clubs are an opportunity for members to discover new authors and writing styles. All members of the club need to be aware of the type of books the club will be discussing. If the club wishes to use the resources of the Library Service, the selection of books will be limited to those available in sets of multiple copies. These titles can be viewed through the link on the CRL website, or Library staff can help with identifying them.

- **Club Name**

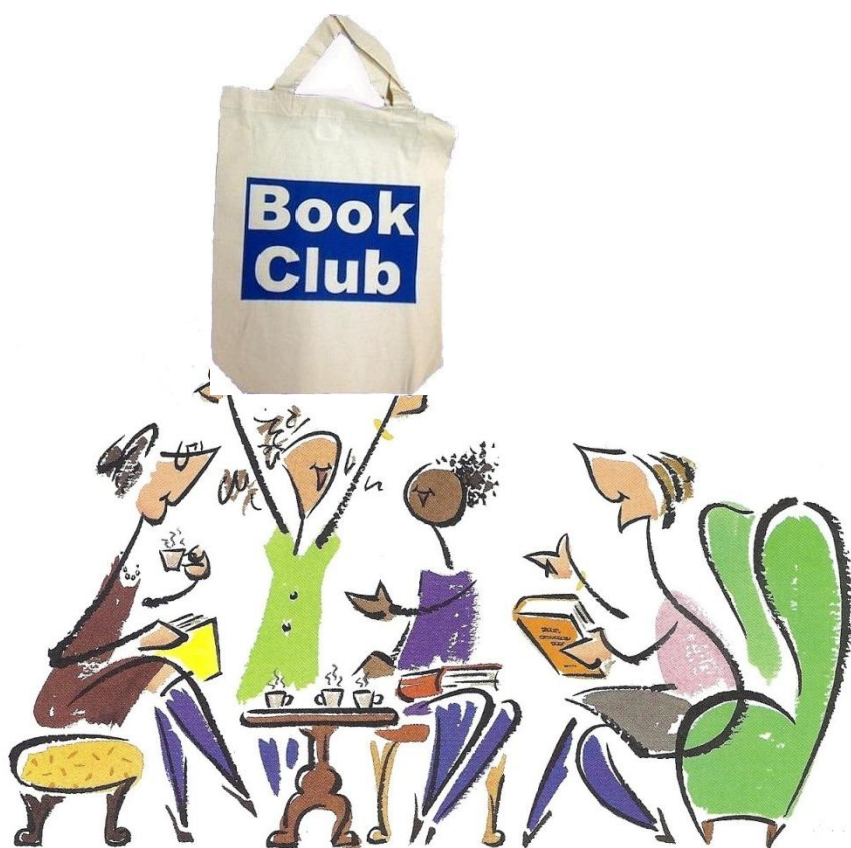
The Book Club will be required to provide a club name when it joins Clarence Regional Libraries. Naming the club also provides a sense of unity.

- **Contact Person**

The Club needs to identify a person who will be the contact for the library. This person will be identified on the Book Club Library card and will be responsible for return of the book kits. They will also be the contact for any interested new members.

- **Meeting Format**

The structure of a meeting is very much the choice of the club. It may be casual and conversational or follow a formal agenda. These considerations should be negotiated at the first meeting.



- **Atmosphere**

Atmosphere is closely related to the structure of the club's meeting. The venue you choose will have some impact on the atmosphere of the club meeting. Other considerations include food & drink, and socialising time.

- **House Rules**

To ensure that all members enjoy the experience of being in the Book Club, it is sometimes helpful to discuss some guidelines relating to meeting etiquette.

- **Club Size**

Ideal number of book club numbers is 8-15, with the optimum number being 10-12. While the variety and commitment of members matter more than the quantity, do ensure there will be enough people for a good discussion in the event of a few absentees or non finishers.

- **Fees**

A book club may incur costs in its everyday operation, for example, with food, coffee or stationary. If this is the case, you may wish to discuss a maximum monthly fee and how this money is to be collected and recorded.

- **Membership**

Advise the Club of the responsibilities of all parties.

Nominate a club co-ordinator who is willing to take on the administration of the club.

A guide to the role of a Book Club Co-ordinator is included in this kit.

Details of club members should be recorded on a Membership List maintained by the Club Co-ordinator. A basic template is also provided in this kit.

The Do's and Don'ts of running a book club

Most book clubs tend to read fiction rather than non-fiction. Be very cautious in selecting a non-fiction book. Most book clubs discover that there cannot be much discussion about facts. Good books to consider though would be biographies or books on a topic that everyone is interested in. For example everyone could bring along their favourite Thai cooking book.

Book clubs members should be cautious about the number of people admitted into the group. Too large a group may cause individuals to dominate the discussion and intimidate other group members. Some individuals may refrain from offering their opinions.

Have one person keep records of books read, and also books suggested and who suggested them. Make sure everyone participates in the discussion. If a question is asked, everyone should contribute in the round robin. If you see someone being left out, prompt them for their opinion. Keep notes while reading...and not just when you are the leader. It helps to deepen discussion if specific passages can be read.

Even if you dislike the book do not blame the person who suggested it. Your dislike of the book will enliven discussion. Build your reasons and enjoy that intense interaction with other club members who love the book. After the discussion, you may discover an appreciation for the book that you never had before.

Choose 2 or 3 titles per month

Consider compiling a reading list 3-6 months in advance. Also consider reading more than one title per month if there are not enough copies available of the one title. This allows members to read at their own pace. It's especially helpful for those who travel or miss a meeting or two.

Establish limits

Set some basic ground rules up front, so you don't get into misunderstandings as you go along. Some clubs limit selections to paperbacks due to cost or weight; others read both soft and hard-cover. Some clubs limit page numbers—400 pages is a healthy read for a monthly assignment. Others enjoy longer reads at 700 pages—or shorter at 300. You can also split up longer books into 2 sessions.

Explore themes Focus on a specific author, theme or genre.

Source: www.canadianbookclubs.com/tips.html

The role of Club Co-ordinator in a Book Club

As the Book Club evolves, the role of the Group Co-ordinator will change. Below are some tasks that should be addressed by the Club Co-ordinator. These tasks may be delegated to other club members; however, it is preferable that the same person regularly liaise with the library. Maintain membership list and contact details including email addresses to allow for the easy distribution of information

- Act as liaison with library staff
- Responsibility for reserving / borrowing and returning book kits
- Contact person for interested new members
- Maintain a list of the books read by the club
- Make copy of club rules available to all members; give copies to new members
- Maintain order at meetings
- Lead discussion at meetings - this role may be rotated amongst members.

Running an Effective Book Club Meeting

The structure of a meeting is very much the choice of the group. It may be casual and conversational or follow a formal agenda. The group may wish to adapt its style as it develops.

Key items that should be addressed at each meeting are outlined below.

Start the meeting

It is advisable to formally start the discussion in some way, so as to get the group discussion started on time.

Discussion

Make sure your club has at least two members who are willing to lead discussion; this will ensure a long life for your club. We have found that the most successful clubs are those in which participants take turns leading. Some clubs use co-leading, a process in which two people lead a discussion together. Before the entire club meets, the leader should prepare the discussion questions with a co-leader or another member of the club. Because each person will bring a different point of view to the reading, two people working together can prepare better questions than either could alone. Refer to the Discussion Ideas' section of this document if your group would like some direction. Possible questions that can be used to facilitate discussion are also provided.

Closure

- Organise the collection/return of the old books.
- Organise the distribution of the new books.
- Confirm details of next meeting and arrange for someone to contact those members who were not present to swap books and notify of next meeting.

Source: Moreton Bay Libraries

Meeting Etiquette for Book Clubs

This sheet suggests some house rules to be considered by any group. These should be addressed at the first meeting, and the group should record their decisions.

The club may decide not to formally discuss these issues, preferring to address issues as they arise. Some basic discussion early in the Club's existence may reduce tension within the group.

Are children permitted?

The group may be happy to allow children who do not make a disturbance.
Club Members may wish to jointly hire a baby-sitter.

Discussion

Club Members may wish to meet before or after to socialise and chat.
Private discussions should probably be saved for later privacy or carried out in another room.
Is turn-taking in discussion required?

Reading the Book

If a member has not read the book, should they attend the session?
Will the club provide a report on the plot line at the start of the session?

Guests

Are guests of members permitted?
If so, are there limitations on who would be welcome, and how many times?

Discussion Ideas for Book Clubs

Discussion Topics

When planning your book club discussions, you may like to address the following areas:

Characters and Storyline

The way the author develops the characters is a common discussion topic. Our response to characters is driven by our personal experiences. Since character analysis is the study of human nature, how self is perceived and enacted is the subject of much discourse on every level of literary analysis.

Characters' Actions

Characters' actions involved the relationship between fate and free will.

Are characters' actions the result of destiny or choice?

Your attitude toward character's actions will reflect the way you assign moral responsibility for what happens in the novel.

Social Implications

Changing circumstances of the external world affect characters (and our) concepts of morality and humans place in the universe. Questions raised in literature concerning moral responsibility connect to the events happening in our daily lives.

Symbolism

Symbols have specific political, religious or cultural references.

Author's Purpose

Searching for the meaning behind the story is one of the major goals of group inquiry.

Credibility

During your discussion, you will be able to discern the authorial reasons for stretching credibility.

Some novels are flawed because they ask too much of our indulgence; in others, such as fantasy, it is accepted as part of the form.

Reader's Emotional Response

How you feel at certain stops along the plotline is important. You can discuss your intellectual response to the behaviour of the character as well as your emotional reaction to the plotline action.

Resolution

Does the plot-ending meet your satisfaction?

Personal Reference

Personal references actually make up a large portion of reading group discussions. Our personal, real-life experiences are rendered important and meaningful in connection to the book and enlarge our understanding of it.

Literary Merit

What constitutes good literature? Is it a well-written book?

Work's Similarity to Other Readings

Comparing and contrasting the present work with other works or with other works by the same author is very natural.

Narrative

Narrative concerns the process, form and technique employed by an author to tell the story. Variant forms influence reader responses, and discussion of this is important in any analysis you give a book.

Theme

What is the idea that builds and drives the force of the story? Everything - language, symbols, form, character development, storyline - should reinforce the theme.

Point of View

The author's and characters' point of view (angle of vision) may not always be the same. 11

Style

Style addresses not who or what is told, but how the story is told - the language, diction, sentence structure and syntax.

Setting

Setting - along with character, plot and theme - is one of the basic components of a story. Much can be gained from examination of the setting an author has chosen. Authenticity and selectivity of detail can be an important part of your discussion.

Time and Memory

The effect of the presence of time, the passage of time and the limitations it produces are of great interest. In a story, characters pass through their present, carrying their pasts in their memories and their hopes for the future in their hearts.

Source: —The Reading Group Handbookll, by Rachel Jacobsohn in Moreton Library Book Club Kit

Websites that may be useful for discussion guidance	Name of Source
Book Browse	www.bookbrowse.com/
Macmillan	www.macmillan.com/Picador.aspx
Random House	www.randomhouse.com/rgg/
Random House	www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/rgg/
Penguin	www.penguin.com.au/readers/book-club.cfm
Reading Group Guides	www.readinggroupguides.com/findaguide/title.asp
HarperCollins	www.harpercollins.com.au/readers/index.aspx
Hachette Australia	www.hha.com.au/readinggroups/

Some Useful Discussion Questions

While reading a book, a club member should reflect on these questions, and research other supplementary materials. This is most important if you are leading the book discussion.

- Did you like the book? If you have read any of the author's other books, how does this compare?
- What is this book's message?
- How did you feel about the characters?
- Who did you like or not like and why?
- What did you think of the ending?
- In a movie version, who would play what parts?
- How did you feel when the character did or said....How do you think the character felt when he/she did or said...?
- If questions...e.g. If the characters had done this instead, how would the story have changed?
- What do book reviews say about this book or more generally the author, and his/her past works?
- What did you think of the plot line development? How credible did the author make it?
- What moral/ethical choices did the characters make? What did you think of those choices?
- How would you have chosen?
- How authentic is the culture or era represented in the book?
- Why do you think the author wrote this? What is her most important message?
- How do you think the main character's point of view is similar or different from the author's point of view or background?
- What is the author's background (his/her style, stature and focus)?
- How does the setting figure as a character in the story?
- Are the characters' actions the result of freedom of choice or of destiny?
- Is there any moral responsibility that was abdicated?
- Are there any symbols that may have cultural, political or religious reference? e.g. flag, tree, rose.
- What type of vision does the author use with his/her word choice? Is it optimistic, pessimistic, prophetic, cautionary, humorous, satirical, venomous, cathartic?
- What effects do the events (time, nationality, physicality) have on the character's self or personality?
- Remember to for your book of choice. Usually a publisher will include some questions specific to a book.

Source: www.canadianbookclubs.com/discuss.html

Recommended by: [State Library Qld](#)/[Public Library Service](#)