

What is a book club?

A book club is a group of book lovers who come together to talk about books and reading. Book clubs can be organised in a variety of ways, through word of mouth, contacting the Library, online sites that feature book club and many more.

Most clubs choose a selection of books and rotate titles on a regular basis with most clubs choosing to read the same title to discuss during the meetings. Some book clubs are theme based instead and members read different books based on the theme and then discuss each title.

Why start or join a book club?

A story is always better if you have someone to share it with. What could be better than sharing it with a group of people who have read it too?

Book Clubs allow you to meet book loving people who like to talk about the books they read and to discover new authors, topics and genres in a social and fun way. It is a great way to increase your circle of friends and expand your social activities in a low cost way.

Steps for starting a book club

Some things to think about before starting a book club as they will help to determine who to invite and what books to read

What kind of book club do you want to start?

- A highly social book club where the main focus is to enjoy everyone's company and share a book, members may also share something in common (besides being book lovers).
- A more serious, academic and diverse one with the main focus being to analyse and discuss the books.
- Or, somewhere in between?

How many members is the right amount?

- 6 to 14 members is ideal. Smaller groups (somewhere between six and ten) are great because they allow everyone a chance to participate, while larger groups (ten-plus) allow for greater diversity.
- A Club needs enough members so that even if several are absent the group can still have an active discussion but not so many that the discussions become difficult or messy.
- Getting started – start with 2 or 3 friends (all book lovers); ask each of them to invite 1 or 2 others. It's not important for everyone to know one another; it can be more fun if you don't. Once established the group can decide to expand or not.
- Caution – find people with similar reading styles, if some find Dostoevsky an easy read while others find Danielle Steel challenging the group will not work.

How often should the Club meet?

- The important thing is to choose a schedule that will be easy to remember and then to stick to it.
- Once a month is a good, most people would have enough time to finish the book.
- Alternatively every 6 weeks can give everyone a little extra time to finish a book.
- Some book clubs will take a break over summer or holiday periods.
- Once the schedule is decided set the dates for the year during the first meeting.

When should the Club meet?

This will be a hard decision, and will depend on the Club members, e.g. if it was a parents group they wouldn't be available of an evening.

- Times generally can be split into mid-morning, lunchtime, afternoon or early evenings on either weekdays or weekends.
- The duration of the meeting will depend on the group, generally 1 ½ hours to 2 ½ hours works well.

Where should the Club meet?

- Alternate between members houses.
- Restaurants or Cafés that are open to the idea and have an atmosphere conducive to lively discussion.
- Libraries.
- Parks.

What kind of books will the Club read?

- Consider the level of difficulty; varying titles between challenging works and those on the lighter side may keep members engaged.
- Fiction – mix of genres or just one genre.
- Non-fiction – mix of subjects or just one subject.
- Genres and Subjects can include: Fantasy, Science fiction, Crime, Mystery, Romance, Horror, Paranormal Romance, Biographies, History, Sport, Science, Food, Gardening, and True Crime.
- Will the group read the same book each month or will they read a different title on a particular subject or genre?
- Consider following *Read Watch Play* (year-long blog run by Librarians encouraging people to read according to monthly themes) for ideas on monthly reading themes.
- Remember that eBook version of titles may be available for loan or purchase, check out the lending collection of over 5,000 titles from Parramatta City Library - <http://parralibrary.wheelers.co>.

How will the Club members communicate?

- Email is probably the most efficient and easiest way.
- Setting up monthly emails to send out a reminder of meetings would be helpful, reminders 2 weeks in advance are useful.
- For people who haven't got emails it's a good idea to share phone numbers.
- Text messages via mobile phones are also an easy way to send reminders and keep in touch and may suit people who don't have email or don't check their email very often.

Refreshment Logistics

- Decide who will be providing refreshments for the group – will everyone bring a plate or will the leader be expected to provide snacks and drink.
- Consider individual differences in the snack and drink choices – some people may be vegetarian or don't drink alcohol.
- Snacks and drinks tied into themes/time period of the book can be fun and enlightening.

Keeping Memories - How will the Club keep a record of what it reads?

- Create a folder to keep records of the books read and plot summaries, who suggested what titles, discussion highlights and member opinions.
- Ask for a volunteer for each meeting to note down comments regarding the book discussion or the leader can be responsible.
- Give each book a Club rating at the end of each meeting and make a note – at the end of the year consider giving a small prize to the person who suggested the most highly rated book and the least rated book.
- Ratings can be based on your overall enjoyment of the book or on an analysis using plot complexity, depth, range of appeal, how easy/hard to finish, examples of ratings include:
 - 5 stars = one of my favourite books of all time
 - 4 stars = I think it is a great book
 - 3 stars = I think it is worth reading
 - 2 stars = It has some worthwhile elements
 - 1 star = It may be popular with other readers, but I'm not seeing it
- The Parramatta Library Blog (*Parra Reads*) will publish your Club's review especially when they use the Book Club Kits,
- Consider using Twitter or setting up your own Club blog to post reviews.
- Join an online discussion forum like Good Reads where you can get recommendations and reviews.

Naming your Book Club

Naming your Book Club can help to give your group a shared image of what the group represents and unifies your members. Names can relate to the type of group e.g. Fiction Fanatics, for groups that read only fiction, or to when/where they meet e.g. 1st Saturday Evening or Parra Readers.

Some ideas:

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|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| ▪ Book Smart | ▪ Anywhere | ▪ Bookmarkers |
| ▪ Good Coffee | ▪ Anytime Read | ▪ The Raging Readers |
| ▪ Great Reads | ▪ Mad Readers | ▪ Novel Ideas |
| ▪ Page Turners | ▪ A Novel Bunch | ▪ Fantastic Fiction |
| ▪ Chapter Ones | ▪ Book Clubbers | |
| ▪ The Read-a-lots | ▪ Bookends | |

Advertising your Book Club

Advertising your Book Club can be useful for finding new members, accessing extra resources for your book club, newsletters, entering competitions, publishing your review and finding recommended reads for your group.

There are many organisations or websites that offer to advertise/register your club, some of them include:

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|---|---|
| ▪ Parramatta City Library Blog | ▪ Reading Group Guides website |
| ▪ Parramatta City Council Community Information Directory | ▪ The Big Book Club website |
| ▪ Good Reading Magazine | ▪ Set up a Pinterest/Facebook/Twitter account to let others know what you are reading and promote your Book Club. |
| ▪ Good Reads website | |
| ▪ The Reading Room website | |

Tips for running a meeting

Now that you have Book Club members, where and when to meet the next steps are deciding how best to run the meetings so that they run smoothly and regularly.

Meeting Structure

- Allow anywhere between 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours per meeting.
- Example of breakdown
 - Book discussion – 1 hour / 1 ½ hour
 - Club administration - 15 minutes / 20 minutes
 - Social time – 15 minutes / 40 minutes

Leadership and Organisation – who will run the meeting?

The discussion leader's role is facilitate the meetings to make sure discussion flows, not too much time is spent on any one topic, and that all members get an equal chance to speak.

The leader will be in charge of keeping everyone organised, such as sending emails to remind everyone of when and where the next meeting takes place. They can help with making sure everyone has access to the book for the meeting by collecting Book Club kits from Parramatta City Library.

The discussion leader can research interesting, lesser-known facts about the author and/or the book's setting, time period, etc., and then share with the group. Most author biographies can be found on publishers' web sites. They can also be in charge of keeping notes on the books read, who suggested them, comments made and Club rating of the titles.

- Ask for a volunteer from the group who might like to lead the Club, either for all meetings or on a rostered basis if more than one person volunteers.
- The leader could be the person who chose the book.
- If the meetings are being hosted at someone's house then the host/hostess can lead the discussion.
- Invite an outside facilitator (English teacher or librarian), paid or unpaid.
- Without a leader – Take turns going around the room, allowing each member to talk about his or her experience reading the book. Take turns sending out reminder emails/text messages about the future meetings.

Members who haven't finishing reading a book

- Even members who haven't finished reading the book should come along to meetings. Remember not everyone can finish every book but they can still contribute to the discussion.

Disagreements and strong personalities

- Not everyone interprets a book in the same way, and there may be disagreements. Remember to respect every ones opinions and let members have their say. Differing opinions are good and can make discussions interesting.
- Some members of the group may enjoy the socialising part of the meeting better that the book discussion. To avoid losing track of time and people becoming annoyed hold the book discussion first and invite people to socialise at the end of the meeting.

- Strong personalities can cause problems, some strategies to deal with this include:
 - “Why don’t we hear what others think” is one approach.
 - Have a timer and set it to 2-3 minutes, when the timer goes off the person stops talking.
 - Have an object, e.g. small ball that you pass around the room, members can only talk when they are holding the object.
 - Of course if everything fails and the club is still experiencing problems it may become necessary for the good of the club to ask the person to leave. If it comes to this, do it in person or over the phone, it is never ok to send an email.

Leading the Book Discussion

- Hand out index cards. Ask everyone to write a question or observation; then select one or more to discuss, depending on time constraints, making sure that everyone has a chance to voice their opinion.
- Split the group into pairs or threes and give them one question each to discuss with each other and then with the whole group.
- Use a prop (object) related to the story. It can help stimulate thinking about some aspect of the story. Adult version of show & tell!
 - Maps, photographs, paintings, food, apparel, a music recording, a film sequence.
- Pick out a specific passage from the book description, an idea, a line of dialogue—and ask members to comment on it.
 - How does the passage reflect a character...or the work's central meaning...or members' lives or personal beliefs?
- Choose a primary character and ask members to comment on him or her. Consider: character traits, motivations, how he/she affects the story's events and interactions with other characters.
- Use an icebreaker activity to loosen everyone up and get the discussion off to an enthusiastic start.
 - Play Charades or Hangman with a character or theme from the book.

Taking part in the Book Discussion

- Avoid "like" or "dislike." Those terms aren't very helpful for moving discussions forward, and they can make others feel defensive. Instead, talk about your experience, how you felt as you read the book.
- Support your views. Use specific passages from the book as evidence for your ideas. This is a literary analysis technique called “close reading.”
- As you read each novel, jot down page numbers and particularly interesting passages that moved you and where you found answers to the discussion questions, take your notes to the meeting.

Selecting the Reading List

Some “do’s” and “don’ts”

- Don't read favourites. Reading a book someone "just loves" can lead to hurt feelings—like inviting people into your living room to critique your decor. Best to stay on neutral territory.
- Do mix genres. A steady diet of one thing can be dull. Try interspersing fiction—current and classic—with nonfiction: poetry, history, or biography.
- Do explore themes. Focus on a specific author, travel journals, childhood memoirs, books on food, or a literary issue (family, loss, working of fate). Don't do it for the whole year, maybe just 3 or 4 months.

- Don't choose for the whole year. It ties you into a rigid year-long schedule with no flexibility to add exciting new works you might learn about. And it's unfair for those who miss that one meeting.
- Do choose 2 or 3 at a time. This allows members to read at their own pace. It's especially helpful for those who travel or miss a meeting or two.
- Do use your local library do source books so that copies of the book can be borrowed instead of bought. Parramatta City Library offers Book Club kits for a small annual fee.

Ways to select

- A different member selects the book each month, can use name alphabetical order, birthdays, or any other way.
- If a different member hosts the meeting each month let that person select that title
- Let everyone bring a selection of titles to a meeting and have a vote, either around the room or a blind vote.
- Have everyone bring in one or two selections and draw them out of a hat

Finding Book Selections and Book Discussion Questions

- Searching local libraries for available Book Club Kits.
- Newspapers and magazines often have a reading recommendation or review, especially on weekends.
- Many online sources are available, many are mentioned in the section on page 3 in Registering your Book Club and more include:
 - Nancy Pearl
 - I love Libraries
 - The Bookreporter
 - Lit Lovers
 - ABC First Tuesday Book Club
 - Oprah Winfrey's Book Club
 - The Reading Club (A British site)
 - Reading Group Choices
 - Reading Group Guides
 - Book-Group-Resources
 - Bookshop and Publisher top picks
 - Allen & Unwin A-Z reading notes
 - Freemantle Press book club notes
 - Harper Collins reading groups and guides
 - Pan Macmillan Australia Reading Group Notes
 - Penguin Group (Australia) Book Club
 - Random House Australia.

Generic Book Discussion Questions

For Fiction

1. How did you **experience the book**? Were you immediately drawn into the story--or did it take you a while? Did the book intrigue, amuse, disturb, alienate, irritate, or frighten you?
2. Why do you think the **author chose the title**? Is there a significant meaning behind it?
3. Do you find the **characters convincing**? Are they believable? Compelling? Are they fully developed as complex, emotional human beings--or are they one-dimensional?
4. Which characters do you particularly **admire or dislike**? What are their primary characteristics?
5. What **motivates** a given character's actions? Do you think those actions are justified or ethical?
6. Do any characters **grow or change** during the course of the novel? If so, in what way?
7. How does the author use **language and imagery** to bring the characters to life? Did the book's characters or style in any way remind you of another book?
8. Who in this book would you most **like to meet**? What would you ask—or say?
9. If you could **insert yourself** as a character in the book, what role would you play? You might be a new character or take the place of an existing one.
10. Is the **plot well-developed**? Is it believable? Do you feel manipulated along the way, or do plot events unfold naturally, organically?
11. Is the story **plot or character driven**? In other words, do events unfold quickly? Or is more time spent developing characters' inner lives? Does it make a difference to your enjoyment?
12. Consider **the ending**. Did you expect it or were you surprised? Was it manipulative? Was it forced? Was it neatly wrapped up--too neatly? Or was the story unresolved, ending on an ambiguous note?
13. If you could **rewrite the ending**, would you? In other words, did you find the ending satisfying? Why or why not.
14. Can you **pick out a passage** that strikes you as particularly profound or interesting--or perhaps something that sums up the central dilemma of the book?
15. Does the book remind you of **your own life**? An event or situation? A person--a friend, family member, boss, co-worker?
16. If you were to **talk with the author**, what would you want to know? (Many authors enjoy talking with book clubs. Contact the publisher to see if you can set up a phone chat.)
17. Have you read the **author's other books**? Can you discern a similarity—in theme, writing style, structure—between them? Or are they completely different?
18. What do you believe is **the message** the author is trying to convey to the reader? What did you **learn** from this book? Was it **educational** in any way?
19. Do you think the **setting, both time and location**, played a large role in this novel? Could it have happened anywhere, at any time? If so, how would the novel have changed?

For Non-Fiction

If your book is a **cultural portrait** --of life in another country, or different region of your own country--start with questions **a ... b ...and c** first:

- a.** What does the author **celebrate or criticise** in the culture? Consider family traditions, economic and political structures, the arts, language, food, religious beliefs.
 - b.** Does the author wish to **preserve or reform** the culture? If reform, what and how? Either way—by instigating change or by maintaining the status quo—what would be gained or what would be at risk?
 - c.** How does the culture **differ** from yours? What was most surprising, intriguing, and difficult to understand? After reading the book, have you gained a new perspective—or did the book affirm your prior views?
1. Does the book offer a **central idea or premise**? What are the problems or issues raised? Are they personal, spiritual, societal, global, political, economic, medical, and scientific?
 2. Do the issues **affect your life**? How so—directly, on a daily basis, or more generally? Now or sometime in the future?
 3. What **evidence** does the author give to support the book's ideas? Does he/she use personal observations and assessments? Facts? Statistics? Opinions? Historical documents? Scientific research? Quotations from authorities?
 4. Is the evidence **convincing**? Is it relevant or logical? Does it come from authoritative sources? (Is the author an authority?) Is the evidence speculative...how speculative?
 5. Some authors make **assertions**, only to walk away from them—without offering explanations. It's maddening. Does the author use such unsupported claims?
 6. What kind of **language** does the author use? Is it objective and dispassionate? Or passionate and earnest? Is it polemical, inflammatory, and sarcastic? Does the language help or undercut the author's premise?
 7. Does the author—or can you—**draw implications** for the future? Are there long- or short-term consequences to the problems or issues raised in the book? If so, are they positive or negative? Affirming or frightening?
 8. Does the author—or can you—**offer solutions** to the problems or issues raised in the book? Who would implement those solutions? How probable is success?
 9. Does the author make a **call to action** to readers—individually or collectively? Is that called realistic? Idealistic? Achievable? Would readers be able to affect the desired outcome?
 10. Are the book's issues **controversial**? How so? And who is aligned on which sides of the issues? Where do you fall in that line-up?
 11. Can you point to **specific passages** that struck you personally—as interesting, profound, silly or shallow, incomprehensible, illuminating?
 12. Did you **learn something new** reading this book? Did it broaden your perspective about a difficult personal issue? Or a societal issue? About another culture in another country... or about an ethnic / regional culture in your own country?

From - <http://www.ilovelibraries.org/booklovers/bookclub/bookclub>

Useful Links for Book Clubs

Book Reviews, Recommendations, Book Club Registrations

- Parra Reads - official Reading Blog of Parramatta City Library
<http://parrareads.parracity.nsw.gov.au/>
- Pinterest – Parramatta Library
<http://www.pinterest.com/parralibrary/>
- Parramatta City Council Community Information Directory
<http://bit.ly/PCLCommInfo>
- Good Reading Magazine, Novelist Plus database, Who Else Writes Like database and more resources for readers – available to access online by Library Members
<http://j.mp/PCLread>
- Good Reads – website, Apple and Android apps
<http://www.goodreads.com/group>
- The Reading Room – website
<http://www.thereadingroom.com/book-clubs>
- The Big Book Club – website
<http://www.thebigbookclub.com.au>
- Nancy Pearl (Book Lust) – website featuring professional Librarian and reading advocate
<http://www.nancypearl.com>
- I Love Libraries – website created by the American Library Association
<http://www.ilovelibraries.org/booklovers/bookclub/bookclub>
- The Book Reporter - website
<http://www.bookreporter.com>
- Lit Lovers –website, recommendations and reading guides
<http://www.litlovers.com/>
- ABC First Tuesday Book Club – website for the ABC TV show with Jennifer Byrne
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday>
- Oprah Winfrey’s Book club – website
http://www.oprah.com/book_club.html
- The Reading Club – UK website
<http://www.thereadingclub.co.uk/>
- Reading Group Choices – website
<http://www.readinggroupchoices.com/>
- Fantastic Fiction – excellent website for Author, Title and Series information
<http://www.fantasticfiction.com>

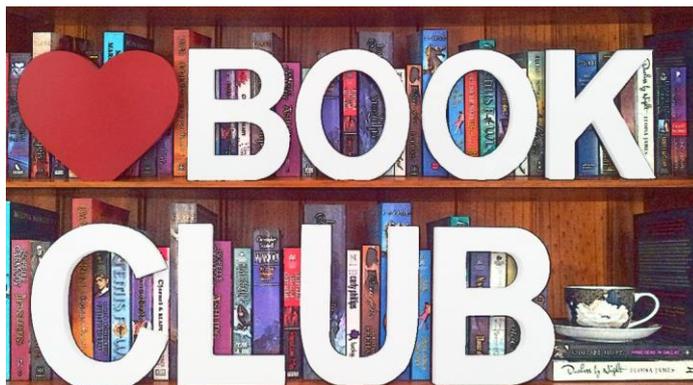
Book Discussion Notes/Reading Guides

- Reading Group Guides – website with over 3,700 reading guides
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>
- Book Browse – website
http://www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides/title/
- Allen & Unwin A-Z Reading Notes – publisher website
<http://www.allenandunwin.com/default.aspx?page=447>
- Fremantle Press Book Club Notes – publisher website
<http://www.fremantlepress.com.au/resources/bookclubs>
- Harper Collins Reading Groups – publisher website
<http://www.harpercollins.com.au/readers/readinggroups.aspx>
- Pan Macmillan Australia Reading Group Notes – publisher website
<http://www.panmacmillan.com.au/readers.asp>
- Penguin Books Australia Book Club – publisher website
<http://www.penguin.com.au/book-clubs>
- Random House Australia – publisher website
<http://www.randomhouse.com.au>
- Simon & Schuster Australia Book Clubs – publisher website
<http://readinggroups.simonandschuster.com.au>
- Text Publishing Reading Group Guides – publisher website
<http://textpublishing.com.au/resources/reading-group-guides>

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