

## Starting a Book Club at Your Library

### 4 Quick Tips for Working with Your Librarian and Getting Launched

Book clubs -- or reading groups, if you prefer -- seem simple enough to throw together, but fledgling clubbers inevitably hit a few snags after the initial burst of momentum. Here are 4 tips on starting a book club.

1. **Decide what kind of books you want to read.** If you have a group interested in the idea, then talk with your librarian about how to find the kind of books they want. Not every book club has to have a theme, but if you go the "random" route, you should at least work with your librarian to identify types of books that fit your needs. For instance, if you have a group of mystery lovers, other kinds of fiction might be ok, but self-help manifestos aren't likely to be considered. Being honest (and up-front) with your librarian in the beginning about the fact that, for example, graphic novels make your skin crawl will help avoid tension later. When you have a few people interested in your club, then invite them in on these conversations with your librarian.

Consider social service groups to which you belong. A book club component to your work on, for example, children's or homeless services, can add a welcome dimension to your group. Reading fiction and biographies in that area may make the actual work more rewarding. Your librarian can help you find other social service groups with whom yours might like to join in developing a book club.

2. **Hammer out the logistics.** Settling food, beverages, timing, and location choices firmly will have two advantages for you. First, it'll help your librarian maximize library resources for you by, for example, reserving a space that allows finger food. Second, it'll demonstrate your competence and commitment to potential members.

Take care to consider involvement of those who have life circumstances that make participation a bit difficult. Books should be affordable and/or your librarian can help insure that the library has extra copies for loan. Timing might be more in the evening or on weekends to accommodate working participants. Consider contacting directors of social service agencies to see if it's possible to get transportation worked out for those who don't have cars. For example, the local domestic violence shelter may be bringing clients in to use library computers for job searching; having them stay an extra hour for a book club on self-help, parenting, or general fiction could be relatively easy.

3. **Keep the invitation open.** Even the most successful book clubs have a pretty substantial turnover rate. Always be on the lookout for potential members through networking. Your librarian might know of similar clubs in the library or at other community forums. **KEEP ADVERTISING.**

Consider drawing from community interest groups. A church group for women or a cooking course for couples might be the kernel of your continuous invitation to the community. Consider common needs, such as unemployment, and draw people together who are living with such needs. They may well be the most excited about the escape of reading fiction or military history. Your librarian will know of other groups that already use the library for community interest purposes, such as genealogists, and may be able to put you in touch with others.

4. **Establish a style.** Work in those first few meetings to determine what kind of style your club will have. Do you hate interrupters so much that you want to bring along a talking stick, or are you cool with everyone jumping into the fray (and may the loudest one win)? Should you choose only books that come with discussion questions in the back, or are you happy coming up with your own? And is it ok to talk about that month's book for a little while and then move onto other subjects like work, kids, celebrity gossip, and weekend plans? Set expectations in advance and be sure newbies understand these social customs. Your librarian can help you come up with support materials such as video clips to help launch discussions or social media tools (like a blog or Flickr site) that keeps the conversation rolling.

(Adapted from <http://www.book-clubs-resource.com/book-clubs/before-starting.php>)

### Helpful Websites

- [http://www.readinggroupguides.com/roundtable/interview\\_library\\_index.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/roundtable/interview_library_index.asp) - Interviews with librarians about book club experiences.
- <http://www.readinggroupchoices.com/> - Offers ideas for book selection and thoughts from users about audience reaction.
- <http://www.goodreads.com/> - User reviews, forums, and features to learn more about almost any book in print today. Users can also create a “bookshelf” of books they’ve read or plan to read and tag them by category or whether they’re already read them or not.