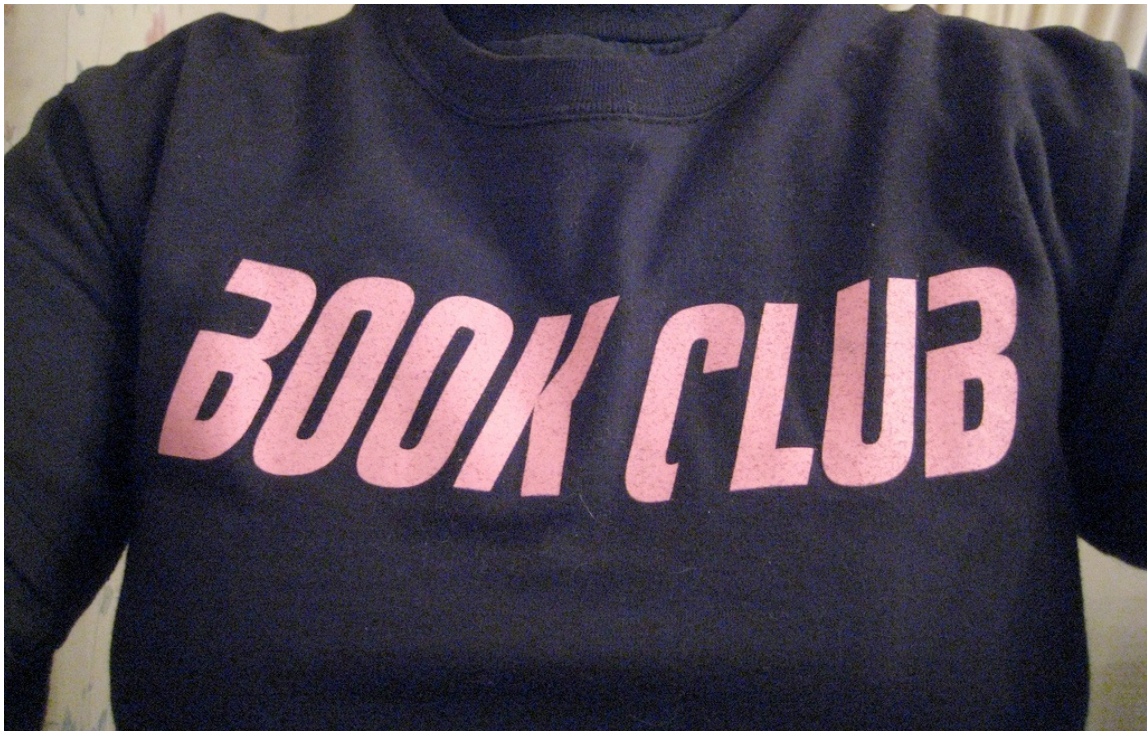

A manual to help your library celebrate

National Reading Group Month

October 2008



Written by:

Martha L. Burns, *Reading Group Journal*

Nancy Dowd, New Jersey State Library

Terry Edwards, Hunterdon County Library

Judith Fenelon, Parsippany-Troy Hills Public Library

April L. Judge, West Caldwell Public Library

April 2008

Table of Contents



1. Introduction
2. How to Develop a Reading Group Profile
3. Rules for Great Reading Groups
4. Questions to Determine if a Book Would be a Candidate for Discussion
5. How to Discuss a Book
10. How to Begin Your Reading Group Discussion
11. Thirty Sample Questions
13. Tips for Leaders
14. Difficulties to Overcome with Reading Group Club Members
15. Resources on Reading Groups
17. Different Structures for Reading Groups
18. Beyond a Book Discussion
23. Publicity
24. Book Discussion Skit
25. Acknowledgments
26. Helpful Information from About.com

Introduction

Reading groups have become extremely popular over the past years. And because of their successes in so many communities throughout the nation, the Women's National Book Association decided to be the official sponsor of National Reading Group Month.

The first nation-wide celebrations of NRG were held last year in cities ranging from Los Angeles to San Francisco to Boston to Manalapan, New Jersey.

The New Jersey Library Association and the New Jersey State Library have agreed to endorse this special month on an annual basis. These organizations hope that this manual (an in-progress manual) will help you plan and present an October 2008 filled with programs to celebrate this special month dedicated to Reading Groups across the county.

If you don't offer a "regular" reading group at your library now is the time to start. This manual will give you tips on how to easily start a reading group in your library setting. And if you already offer a regularly scheduled reading group(s) in your library, you will find ways to enrich, enhance and complement the reading group experiences of a particular book and its author.

Happy Reading!
Happy Discussions!

HOW TO DEVELOP A READING GROUP PROFILE

When you decide that you and your library want to offer Reading Groups to your patrons consider the following.

How often should the group meet?

- Twice a month
- Every other month
- Once a month
- Once every three months
- Other

How long should each meeting run?

- One hour
- An hour and a half
- Two hours

When should the meetings be held?

- Mornings
- Afternoons
- Evenings

What types of books should be discussed?

- Contemporary works
- Classics
- Both
- Other

What types of books will be discussed:

- Fiction
- Nonfiction
- Both

What types of books should be emphasized?

- Well-known works
- Lesser-known works
- Both

RULES FOR GREAT READING GROUPS

Members must enjoy reading and be eager to weigh and consider what they read and then share their responses.

Members must be willing to listen.

At the meeting there should be only one discussion taking place at a time – splinter discussions should be discouraged.

Most groups need a group coordinator – someone who is in charge of such things as meeting dates-and in most cases this role should be rotated.

Most discussions benefit from a discussion leader who is prepared to keep the discussion going and is diligent in letting each member have a voice.

In selecting books all members should have a voice – meaning that not every book will be each member’s personal choice.

Each member must be committed enough to give the selected book a full reading including finishing the work and to attend meetings regularly.

When starting your group agree on guidelines – make them clear – and stick to them.

When in trouble return to your focus which is the book.

Confront your divas before they spoil the group.

If you are not enjoying your reading group – and cannot fix it – drop out and start or find a new one.

QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE IF A BOOK IS A CANDIDATE FOR DISCUSSION

Is there anything different about the author's style?

Does she/he often use figures of speech?

Is the book controversial?

Does the book have many discussable issues within the narrative?

Does the book deal with gripping and current topics and issues?

Is there anything special about the methods of description?

Is the dialogue natural? Does it have a purpose?

Is there an emotional response from the reader?

What are the themes? Are they universal?

How is suspense maintained?

Are the characters interesting? What use is made of minor characters?

Is there foreshadowing?

Is the basic conflict completely resolved?

What makes the first scene a fitting (or unfitting) beginning?

Is there close integration of plot, characters, setting and theme?

HOW TO DISCUSS A BOOK

Author's Purpose

Why do you think the author wrote this book?

What was the author trying to accomplish by writing this book?

Why did the author choose to write about that particular topic?

What is the author's vision of the world, life, the society in general?

Discuss the relationships between the characters especially those of different genders?

What is the author's tone? Pessimistic? Optimistic? Satirical? Cautionary?

Does the book have an autobiographic angle? Time? Place?

Characterization

Were the characters fully drawn?

Did the characters seem real? Believable?

Were the characters complex?

Did the characters have depth to them?

Did you identify with them?

What do you admire or dislike about _____?

What makes a character memorable?

What are the most important relationships in the book?

Were the characters motives and/or actions understandable?

Are any of the characters heroes? Or villains? Why? Why not?

Were the characters influenced by external circumstances?

Were the actions of the characters the result of free will?

Did the characters display moral responsibility?

Was the perspective of the story shaped by the gender of the main character?
How?

How strong were the other characters? What specifically did they do to support the plot?

What stereotypes appear in the characterizations?

Characterization (continued)

Are any of the characters presented in a sensational or sentimental manner?

What are the choices presented to the main characters in the course of the storyline, and what impact do their decisions have on their own lives as well as the lives of others?

Was the protagonist sympathetic?

Credibility

Does the reader have to suspend too much believability?

Events

What, if any, stereotypes appear in the description of the events?

Are the events described in the story presented in a sensational or sentimental manner?

Imagery

Discuss imagery as evident throughout the book.

Language and Literary Style

What do you think of the author's use of language?

Was the use of language integral to the telling of the story?

How did this affect your reading of the book?

Did the author use a past or present voice?

Is there an adequate balance between background facts and plot elements or does one of these tend to dominate the narrative?

What is the story's point of view? Who is telling the story? Are there more than one narrator?

What genre is the book? Humor? Suspense? Historical Fiction?

Is the pace (the amount of action) consistent to the story?

Language and Literary Style (continued)

Is the amount of detail included in the narrative consistent with the story? Are there too many or too few details?

Does the narrative develop dramatically? Slowly? Naturally?

Are the descriptive passages well done? Do you feel a sense of place as a result of these passages?

Are there any particularly effective passages that you want to point out to the group?

(Group members usually attend meetings with these marked.)

Literary Merit

What constitutes good literature?

Would you consider this book to be good literature?

Was this a well-written book?

Is the work responsible to history?

Does the work reflect human experiences?

Does the story reflect contemporary values or does it seem dated?

Point of View

Who is telling the story?

Is there more than one narrator?

Why do you think the author chose this point of view?

Does the point of view make the plot “work”?

Plot

What is the plot?

Are there subplots?

How do the plot and subplot connect? What is the author attempting to say through the action?

How does the author move the story forward?

Readers' Emotional Response

How did you feel when _____ did _____?
How do you think the character felt in this instance?

Resolution

Did the ending meet your satisfaction? Why? Why not?

Setting

What is the time period in which the story takes place?
Why do you think the book was set in this particular time period?
Why is the setting important to the theme of the book?
Did the locale and time period enrich the book?
Did the writer create a setting that was believable and that you could easily visualize?
Did you learn anything new by being there?

Social Implications

What types of moral issues were explored in the story? Were they evident to you or hidden in the narrative?
What questions are raised concerning moral responsibility to events portrayed in the story?
Does the story affirm the human spirit?
Is there redemption in the story?

Symbolism

Are the names of the characters significant? (Familiarize yourself with the names of Old Testament Biblical characters, mythological people, etc.)
What universal symbols (e.g. a flag, a rose, water) are used?
What is the significance of the title? The significance of the book cover's art?
Think about the title and decide what the author is trying to get across to the reader.

Themes

What are the most dominant/important themes in the book?

What themes build or drive the force of the story?

Is the theme reinforced by other elements?

Does the theme have a particular meaning in the contemporary world?

HOW TO BEGIN YOUR READING GROUP DISCUSSION

Use name tags so the participants get to know each other.

Use an ice breaker activity if this is your first meeting. Go around the room and ask the participants to name their favorite book or least favorite book and why.

Introduce the book by presenting a short biography of the author. This information can be located in *Novelist*, from **Current Biography** or **Contemporary Authors**. You can also Google the author's name and discover a great deal of resources on the author and his/her works.

Read several reviews of the book to the participants. These should include both positive and negative reviews.

Provide background information on important aspects of the book such as the Chinese custom of foot binding that was prominent in Lisa See's **Snowflower and the Secret Fan** or the Bataan Death March when discussing **We Band Of Angels** written by Elizabeth M. Norman.

Distribute copies of any author interviews you find in your informational searches.

DO NOT ASK: Did you like the book? This should not be your first question. This is not the point of the group, and this question goes nowhere.

THIRTY SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. What did you enjoy about this book? A character – Why? – In what way does its vitality dominate the story?
2. A twist of the plot? Unexpected? Breath-taking? Believable?
A Narrative that develops – Dramatically? Slowly? Naturally?
3. What are some of the major themes of this book?
4. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
5. Who was your favorite character? What did you appreciate about him/her?
6. Consider the main character: What does he or she believe in? What is he or she willing to fight for?
7. At the end of the book, do you feel hope for the characters?
8. What is stronger in the book: plot or character development? Why? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
9. Have you ever experienced anything similar to the action of this novel?
10. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
11. What are your concerns about this book?
12. How did you feel about the main character?
13. What are the most important relationships in the book?
14. What makes a minor character memorable?
15. What are the most revealing scenes?

THIRTY SAMPLE QUESTIONS (continued)

16. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
17. What did you think of the style of the writer?
18. Was the story credible? The characters credible?
19. Did you find any flaws in the book?
20. Did you enjoy the book?
21. Did you get “into” it? Were you there?
22. Would you recommend it to a friend?
23. What were your favorite scenes?
24. What were the most revealing scenes? Do they further the action of the novel?
25. What in the book did you find particularly interesting? Hard to understand?
26. Did this book work for you? Why? Why not?
27. Would you read another book by this author? Why? Why not?
28. Was the book a memorable read for you? Why? Why not?
30. What are other titles that are similar to this book? Compare them and contrast them.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

Remember that the leader serves the group, not the reverse. A leader's job is to: keep the ball rolling, maintain order, and keep the discussion on track.

Use active listening.

Even if you use a list of standard questions, come up with questions specific to the book being discussed to add depth to the dialogue.

Ask members to come with 3 questions to generate thought and discussion, marked passages to read, or relevant articles.

Encourage conversation about the idea, not necessarily the plot.

Start and end on time.

Clarify ambiguous responses. If you don't understand a member's comments, it's likely others feel the same way but are hesitant to speak up.

Be comfortable with a little silence. It gives people a chance to think an idea through and then express themselves. You can get some thoughtful observations this way.

Recognize when the group has become too fixed on one aspect and move the discussion along to another point.

Know when to wrap things up.

DIFFICULTIES TO OVERCOME WITH READING GROUP MEMBERS

Leaders will serve as “referees” of each group.

1. Boredom. The selection of books to be discussed becomes boring to the members. Those books that are chosen are not provocative and do not lend themselves for a good discussion.
2. Avoid having one person take over the entire conversation. Everyone should have an opportunity to add to the discussion.
3. Everyone should finish the book. It is hard to carry on an intellectual conversation if a member hasn't finished the book. The group must know that in this setting, the members are “allowed” to give away the ending and not keep it a secret just because one or a few people did not complete the reading of the book.
4. Everything that is discussed must flow from the narrative. A separation of personal information and issues and the discussion of the book must be maintained.
5. Members may not use bad, foul language.
6. Members may not make flippant and ill-considered remarks. All members must respect the insights and responses of everyone else in the group.
7. Members should not interrupt others in the group.
8. Members must not stifle the opinions of others.
9. Try to keep the group under 20 so good, high quality discussions may be carried on.
10. Participants should not be late as this is disruptive to the group.
11. Have members turn off their cell phones before the start of the meeting.
12. Consider “no handiwork” such as knitting and cross-stitching. Again these hobbies are distractive to other participants no matter how good a member is in multi-tasking.

RESOURCES ON READING GROUPS

Books

Ellington, Elizabeth and Jane Freimiller
Greenwood, Monique et al.
Jacobsohn, Rachel W.

**A Year of Reading
Go On Girl!
The Reading Group**

Handbook

John, Lauren Zina

Running Book Discussion

Groups

Laskin, David and Holly Hughes

The Reading Group Book

Lovey, Diana

**The Book Club Companion: A
Comprehensive Guide to the
Reading Group Experience**

McMains, Victoria

The Readers' Choice

Moore, Ellen

Good Books Lately

Pearlman, Mickey

What to Read

Reading Group Choices

Published annually. The 2008 publication has another good bibliography of resources to use in working with Reading Groups.

Saal, Rollene

**New York Public Library Guide
to Reading Groups**

Periodicals

Bookmarks: For Everyone Who Hasn't Read Everything

Columns

Neal Wyatt edits the column “*The Reader Shelf*” in each issue of **Library Journal**. This column features books that are first-rate for using in your reading group. Generally this column is theme oriented.

Joyce Saricks writes “At Leisure” a monthly column in **Booklist**, a publication of ALA. Although this column discusses readers advisory issues the books discussed in each column are good reading group choices.

Websites

<http://www.best sellers.about.com>

www.bookgroupexo.com

www.readinggroupchoices.com

www.readinggroupguides.com

www.bookreporter.com

www.faithfulreader.com

www.authorsontheweb.com

www.teenreads.com

<http://www.bookcl.net/login.php>

Blogs

Book Group Buzz: A Booklist Blog: <http://bookgroupbuzz.booklistonline.com/>

Book group tips, reading lists, & lively talk of literary news from the experts at Booklist Online

Book Club Girl: www.bookclubgirl.com A blog dedicated to sharing great books, news and tips with reading group members everywhere and includes reading group resources, lists, reading group guides and much more.

DIFFERENT STRUCTURES

Plan a reading group with a different spin.

Mother/Daughter Reading Group

Parent/Son Reading Group

Father/Son Reading Group

Intergenerational Reading Group

Specialty Genre Reading Group-start a group based on the major interests of your members or solicit members who might be interested in a specialty group: nonfiction, poetry, short stories, chick lit, classics, mysteries and thrillers, etc.

Glen Rock Public Library offers “A Poverty Awareness” Reading Group-for further information contact Roz Pelcyger at pelcyger@bccls.org

BEYOND A BOOK DISCUSSION

To make your National Reading Group Month an enriching one for your patrons, think beyond the discussion of a particular title. Your discussion of a specific book may be enhanced by adding a variety of elements to it. Some elements can be incorporated into a single meeting time or can be scheduled at different but mutually convenient times. The following ideas may be used throughout the year as well.

Hold an **author visit and book signing**. Have an author lead the discussion of one of his/her books. Contact your local bookstore for leads. Encourage local and new authors to identify themselves as possible presenters at your library. Network at conferences and other author events to discover candidates for these types of programs.

Invite an **expert/scholar** on the author, locale or time period of your book to give an additional presentation or lead the discussion of the book.

Attend a lecture or an author reading as a group.

Show the movie version of the book your group has discussed. At the end of the film, through discussion compare and contrast the book versus the film.

Hold a **Book Swap**. Participants bring in a copy of their favorite book in paperback format. After everyone has had the opportunity to booktalk this favorite book, they swap their book for another title that sounds interesting.

Launch, and with great signage fanfare, **Reading Groups in a Box**. Develop several sets of these kits for members of your local reading group to borrow. These kits include between 8-10 copies of a good discussion book (if you have the resources to bulk loan specific titles of books you may not have to

include these and if your budget is tight you may want to approach your Friends group to purchase the books for you), a discussion guide for the leader, biographical information on the author, an author interview if available, several reviews of the book-both positive and negative, a booklist of read-alikes and any other pertinent information that would be useful for the leader to share in discussing the book. These kits may be borrowed on a library member's card for use with his/her own reading group.

Also launch a **Register Your Reading Group Campaign or Contest**. Have local reading groups register with the library. Maintain a file of the books that each group has read. At the end of the year, publish in booklet form the annual reading lists from each group. Set this registration process up on-line if possible.

On your public access TV channel, air weekly **Celebrate National Reading Group Month Book Discussions or Book Talks**. Invite four local reading groups to hold their monthly discussion in front of the camera. Instead of discussing one individual book, each group could book talk several books that viewers might want to read and borrow from the library. During the other 11 months of the year, one of these programs could be aired each month rather than weekly.

Host a **Reading Round-Up**. Bring in an anthology of poems or a collection of short stories. Have the group sit in a circle. Each person reads one poem or a few pages of a story and passes the book on to the next person who reads another poem or continues reading aloud the story.

Read a play aloud or poems that are in some way related to your discussion book: same author, same time period, same setting, etc.

Schedule a **How to Nurture a Reading Group** program. Present tips on how to start a group, what pitfalls to be aware of, how to attract members and how to keep them coming. Booktalk books that have been successful books to discuss and distribute a list of useful resources.

Display books that have been popular with local reading groups and books that are about reading groups as well as reading. Prepare a bibliography of these to distribute. **Create posters** of the covers of some of these books to enhance the book display. Use other **book related, fun props** as part of your display to give it more visual appeal.

Hold a **thematic event tie-in**. Based on a major theme that runs throughout the book your library reading group reads for NRG, plan to visit a museum or other venue that enriches the reading experience of the book. Read **Triangle** by Katherine Weber and visit the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City. Visit a museum that houses Renoir painting or paintings by other impressionistic artists after reading Susan Vreeland's **Luncheon of the Boating Party**. Read **Galileo's Daughter** written by Dava Sobel and visit a planetarium. Read **Cowboys Are My Weakness** written by Pam Houston and go line dancing as a group.

No matter what you're reading, it is always set in certain time period or year. Have the group **listen to music** from that specific era. Or if you're reading Tom Brokaw's **Boom: Sounds of the Sixties** listen to the music of the '60ies.

Hold a **book discussion on-line or on a conference call book chat**.

Hold a **Read-A-Thon**. Participants start reading at a certain time and whoever reads the longest wins a prize. Refreshments, especially coffee, should be available.

Hold a **Favorite Book Contest**. Using the ALA READ poster format, take pictures of local community members holding up their favorite book. Have the participants match up listed quotes about each book with the correct book title. Whoever gets the most matches correct wins a prize.

Hold a **Bookmark Contest**. Customers design a bookmark for the library and the library prints a limited number (100) to distribute to the public. The winner receives a prize.

Sponsor an **essay contest**. Ask potential writers to address *Why I Love To Read*, *The Joy and Passion of Reading* or *What Reading Means to Me*. Or come up with your own slant to the essay writing contest. The winner receives a prize.

Hold a **Reading Group Dinner Discussion**. Have each participant bring a thematically related dish to the dinner. Ask everyone to bring a dish that is mentioned somewhere in the book and have them read the paragraph in which the dish or food appears. Each person should bring copies of their recipe to distribute to all others in the group. Check out the following three titles for recipe ideas and food related books: **The Book Club Cookbook** written by Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp, **Read It and Eat It** written by Sarah Gardner and Mary O'Hare's **Recipe for a Book Club**. For a change of scenery, hold your reading group meeting in a thematically related restaurant. If you read a book by Amy Tan go to a Chinese restaurant.

And if a full meal is too overpowering, hold a **Reading Group Happy Hour**. Appetizers and non-alcoholic drinks while discussing a book or listening to booktalks may be offered. Or if you'd like to make it a true Happy Hour meet at your local martini or wine bar.

Hold a **Bookmaking Day**. Plan a day filled with hands on activities for book-lovers such as how to make a book, journal writing, illustration techniques, collage making, calligraphy, hieroglyphics, discussion of printing presses, and much more related to the making of a book.

Booktalking Around the Table: Everyone Doesn't Have To Read The Same Book: Tips on Booktalking at One of Your Reading Group Meetings. Give each member a specific amount of time to introduce their book. This should be calculated based on the total time of your meeting. Assign a timekeeper to keep on track! Don't give away the ending of your book as members of the audience may truly want to read this book. Give the other participants the opportunity to make comments about each book if they've read it. Make sure everyone participates by at least introducing a book. Consider a theme for the meeting. Should everyone bring a mystery to share, their favorite science fiction title or the best book they read last year? This is also fun to do with your staff during a lunch break.

PUBLICITY

National Reading Group Month is an excellent time to highlight your library as well as attract a new micro-community of existing reading groups in your community.

The State Library and NJLA will be providing a **press release template** for you to promote the activities your library has planned to celebrate National Reading Group Month. Send it to your local newspaper and post to your web site. It will be posted on NJLA's website this August.

Are there book clubs in your community that are not associated with your library? Ask them to participate in the activities your library is hosting for National Reading Group Month. Better yet, ask if they would like to host an event!

Why not videotape 30 second comments from your book club members to download on YouTube and post on your website?

Take pictures of your reading groups, post them to flickr.com and link from your web site. Have fun, let them pose with their favorite book, or go all out use the READ poster software from ALA. Include a picture in your library's newsletter with a link to the flickr page.

Have your mayor and council proclaim October as National Reading Group Month.

Create a fun slide show of all the books your library has available for book groups, add music and post to your web site.

If you have an author come to your library, ask them to read a 30 second PSA for National Reading Group Month and submit to your local radio station.

Book Discussion Group Skit A Demonstration of Groups in Action

By: Deborah Bigelow, Director, Leonia Public Library bigelow@bccls.org

Purpose: To demonstrate how to use some of the discussion techniques suggested by books or other participants.

Best used when: Participants have raised issues of “what do you do when.....” during a preceding part of the workshop or through an earlier survey. If possible, use some of the “solutions” suggested earlier by workshop Participants.

Cast Members

A leader and about 8 volunteer book group members*

The Leader: Should be an experienced book group leader who has prepared in advance, to lead the demo.

Book Group Members: Give each volunteer a slip of paper explaining his or her role, and any other information which may be helpful. Typical roles are: the Verbose Person, the Interrupter, the Self-Deprecating one, the Silent one, the Smart one (who adds interesting facts to the discussion), and the One-Who-Doesn't-Get-It. It's good to have several “normal” characters, which mirrors a real group.

The Skit

Choose a book or story that everyone will know. Fables or fairy tales are good, although famous books or movies may be used. Two successful skits have been done based on The Three Little Pigs and Gone With the Wind.

Give each volunteer a chance to get into character (and swap roles if they want).

The Leader starts the group with an opening questions, such as Who was Your Favorite Character and Why? and the skit is off. It should last about 10 – 15 minutes with time allowed afterward for comments or questions.

*It's ideal to have as volunteers, people who have actually been book discussion leaders, who know the problems, and would enjoy being on the other side.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Burns, Martha

(Handout)

Greenwood, Monique et al.

Jacobsohn, Rachel W.

Laskin, David and Holly Hughes

McMains, Victoria

Pearlman, Mickey

Saal, Rollene

Rules for Great Reading Groups

Go On Girl!

The Reading Group Handbook

The Reading Group Book

The Readers' Choice

What to Read

**New York Public Library Guide to
Reading Groups**

Handouts from the BCCLS Book Discussion Leaders' Workshop held on October 4, 2007. Moderator Deborah Bigelow, Director

From About.com:

How to Start a Book Club

Wonder how to start a book club? Starting your own book club is a great way to stay up on the latest bestsellers and make new friends. Follow these steps on how to start a book club, and don't be discouraged if some members come and go. Great book clubs don't start overnight and will evolve as members' lives change. In the end, however, you may build some lifelong friendships.

Difficulty: N/A

Time Required: Varied

Here's How:

- 1. Get together a core group** - It is much easier to start a book club with two or three people who already have some connection. Ask around the office, play groups, or your church or civic organizations. Sometimes you might find enough people to start a book club right away. Often you'll at least recruit some help in completing the rest of the steps. **(New to the area? Skip to step three).**
- 2. Set a regular meeting time** - An ideal size for a book club is 8 - 11 people. As you can imagine, it is often difficult to coordinate that many schedules. Go ahead and set a regular meeting time and date for your book club with your core group. For instance, my book club meets the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. By setting the time before advertising the book club, you avoid playing favorites when working around schedules and are up front about what commitment is required.
- 3. Advertise your book club** - The best advertising is often word of mouth. If you have a core group of three, and you each know two people who want to join, then all you have to do to start a book club is ask these people. This is a good way to meet friends of friends. If your core group doesn't know of other people to ask, then advertise in your circles of interest (school, work, church) with fliers or announcements. There are often also places to post fliers at the library, book stores and cafes.

4. **Establish ground rules** - Get together with your potential book club members and set the group's ground rules. (You might want everyone's input; however, if you have set ideas of what you want, then set the rules with your core group and announce them at this first meeting). The ground rules should include how books are chosen, who hosts, who leads discussions and what kind of commitment is expected (**See Tips Below**). If you did not set the meeting time with your core group, do that now.
5. **Meet** - Set a schedule for the first few months and start meeting. If the book club is small at first, don't worry about it. Invite people as you go. Some people will be more likely to join an already established book club because they feel less pressure than they would as a founding member.
6. **Keep meeting and inviting people** - Even if your book club is an ideal size, from time to time you'll have the chance to invite new people as other members move away or drop out. Don't be discouraged if you lose members. People's schedules and commitments change. Hopefully you'll always have a core group, and together you can reload.

Tips:

1. **Example Ground Rules:**

My book club decided that a different person would host each month. The hostess is responsible for picking the book, leading the discussion and providing the meal. If we meet at a restaurant, the hostess buys appetizers and wine. We place no restrictions on what books the hostess chooses--fiction, nonfiction, self-help--everything's fair game. We always take December off from reading and plan a fun event out.

2. **How to Choose Books:**

Some groups vote on what books they are going to read at the beginning of the year. Some let the host for the month choose. Some use the best-sellers lists or a national book club--such as Oprah's Book Club--as a guide. No matter how your book club chooses books, you also need to decide if there will be any restrictions on the choices (ie, just fiction, just paperbacks, etc.). Try this [book club reading list](#) for a year of suggestions.

3. Hosting Ideas:

Food is not required, but it helps the discussion roll and makes the book club meetings more fun. Some book clubs meet at a different restaurant each month. Sometimes meetings are held in people's homes. You can choose to have appetizers, a full meal or just dessert. Whether you are out or in a home, I recommend at least having coffee, tea and some snacks. ([Check out these tips](#) for serving dinner at your book club meeting).

4. Leading the Discussion:

Be sure to check out our ready to go [discussion questions](#) on best sellers. Just print out the questions and you're ready to lead.

From About.com:

Structuring your Book Club

Many book clubs also share a meal when they meet. Wondering how to split the time between eating, socializing and discussing the book of the month? Here is an outline for an effective way to structure your book club meeting.

This schedule is planned for an hour and a half book club meeting, but can be adjusted to fit a shorter or longer time frame

Difficulty: Easy

Time Required: 1.5 hours

Here's How:

- 1. Give people time to socialize while they arrive (15 minutes)** - If you are hosting at home, set out some wine and cheese or offer your guests soft drinks and let them chat. This gives you time to finish cooking and your guests time to catch up on their lives. If you are at a restaurant, this can happen while people look over the menu.
- 2. Spend more time getting to know each other over dinner (30 minutes)** - Many book clubs struggle with actually talking about the book because social time is so appealing. Appease your group by letting casual conversation happen while you eat. This will take some of the pressure off of you if you are serving the meal and help the rest of the group get focused before the book discussion begins.
- 3. Discuss the book over dessert(45 minutes)** - Check out [these tips](#) on leading an engaging conversation with your reading group. If you choose to have dessert, people can eat it during the discussion.

Tips:

1. Consider preparing a meal that is themed with the book you are reading.
2. Check out *The Book Club Cookbook* by Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp for recipe ideas from top book club picks.

From About.com:

Tips for Leading Your Book Club

Need to lead a discussion on a best seller with your book club or class? Want tips on how to promote a lively conversation in your book club? Whether you are an outgoing extrovert or the shy one in the group, you can lead your book club in an engaging conversation by following these few simple steps.

Complete steps 1 - 3 before meeting. Steps 4 - 9 tell you what to do during your book club or class.

Difficulty: Easy

Time Required: Varies

Here's How:

- 1. Read the book** - This may seem obvious, but it is the most important step, so it is worth stating. It is a good idea to plan on finishing the book a little earlier than you might otherwise so that you have time to think about it and prepare before your book club meets.
- 2. Write down important page numbers** - If there are parts of the book that made an impact on you or that you think may come up in discussion, write down the page numbers so that you can access the passages easily while preparing and leading the book club discussion.
- 3. Come up with eight to ten questions about the book** - Check out our ready-to-go book club [discussion questions](#) on best sellers. Print them out and you are done with this step. Want to come up with your own questions? Check out the tips for writing book club discussion questions below.
- 4. Let others answer first** - When you are asking questions, you want to facilitate discussion, not come off as a teacher. By letting others in the book club answer first, you will promote conversation and help everyone feel like their opinions matter.

5. **Make connections between comments** - If someone gives an answer to question 2 that connects well with question 5, don't feel obligated to ask questions 3 and 4 before moving to 5. You are the leader and you can go in whatever order you want. Even if you go in order, try to find a link between an answer and the next question. By connecting people's comments to the questions, you'll help build momentum in the conversation.
6. **Occasionally direct questions toward quiet people** - You don't want to put anyone on the spot, but you want everyone to know their opinions are valued. If you have a few talkative people who always jump right in, directing a question to a specific person may help draw out the quieter people (and let the loud people know it is time to give someone else a turn).
7. **Rein in tangents** - Book clubs are popular not only because people like to read, but also because they are great social outlets. A little off topic conversation is fine, but you also want to respect the fact that people have read the book and expect to talk about it. As the facilitator, it is your job to recognize tangents and bring the discussion back to the book.
8. **Don't feel obligated to get through all the questions** - The best questions sometimes lead to intense conversations. That's a good thing! The questions are there as a guide. While you will want to get through at least three or four questions, it will probably be rare that you finish all ten. Respect people's time by wrapping up the discussion when the meeting time is over rather than pushing on until you finish everything you planned.
9. **Wrap up the discussion** - One good way to wrap up a conversation and help people summarize their opinions of the book is to ask each person to rate the book on a scale of one to five.

Tips:

1. When writing your own book club discussion questions, avoid questions that are too general, like "What did you think of the book?" Also avoid questions that have yes or no answers. You want to ask questions that are open ended and help people talk about themes and how the book relates to deeper issues.
2. Do not make dismissive statements toward other people's comments. Even if you disagree, take the conversation back to the book rather than saying "That's ridiculous," etc. Making people feel embarrassed or defensive is a sure way to shut down the conversation.

Don't miss these pages from About.com:

Bestseller Book Club Discussion Questions

Lead your book club discussions with ease. Find discussion questions for the bestsellers that your book club is reading:

http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubquestions/Bestseller_Book_Club_Discussion_Questions.htm

Book Club Reading List

With so many books on the bestsellers lists, how can you decide which books would be good reads for your book club? This reading list provides fiction and nonfiction recommendations for a year of interesting and varied book club reading: <http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubresources/a/bookclublist.htm>

Oprah's Book Club

Oprah made book clubs hip and holds tremendous power in the publishing industry. Find out more about Oprah's Book Club and how you can be a part of it here: http://bestsellers.about.com/od/oprahsbookclub/a/what_is_oprah.htm