

How to start a Book Group

Starting a book group is easier than you think! All you really need to start one up are a few avid readers and a good book. People start or join book groups for many reasons: to enjoy great books and the stimulating discussions they inspire, to open up to new ideas and differing viewpoints, and to meet up with friends, new acquaintances, and other book lovers. Whatever your reason - book groups help make reading even more enjoyable.

The easiest way to start a book club is to call or email a friend who shares your love of books and suggest reading one together. Pick a book you think that everyone will like, be sure to give yourself enough time to finish the book, then set up a time to get together to talk about it.

Group Size

The size of the group is a key ingredient to enjoying the book club experience. Some prefer a smaller, cozier atmosphere of 3-5 friends. Others find a book group discussion livelier in a bigger group of 10 or more. Generally, the ideal group size is between 8 and 12 members. More than 12 members makes it hard to maintain an environment where everyone can be heard. It will be up to you to decide how large to make your group and by what process to invite or accept new members. If and when you decide it's time to widen your book club circle, one way to enlarge the group is to simply ask some of the members to bring a friend to the next meeting. Before long, your book club will take on a life of its own!

Members

While commitment is important, not everyone will be able to make it to every meeting. Too few members attending make discussion more difficult. For smaller book clubs especially, attendance can be an issue. You might want to consider selecting members who are willing to commit to reading the books and attending the meetings. While some groups tend to be homogenous - mothers of preschoolers or coworkers who meet over lunch - other groups are mixtures of various ages and sexes.

Setting Some Ground Rules

Once your group has really got going, you should lay down some ground rules for your group, such as who will arrange the meetings and how you'll make your book selections. Some groups specialize in certain types of reading - fiction, nonfiction, mysteries, or parenting books, for example. Choose books that you think will appeal to the

interest of the group as a whole, are easily available, and can be read in the time between meetings. Paperback selections are most popular in book groups because they are less expensive than their hardcover counterparts, but these decisions are up to the group as a whole. You might want to designate a leader for each meeting to help the flow of discussion. Of course, it's always useful to remember that conflict and disagreement are an essential part of a good book club discussion! Dissenting opinions about your chosen book often result in the liveliest discussions; everyone should have a right to their own opinion while respecting the opinions of other members.

Organisation

To stay organized, it might be a good idea to appoint a secretary who keeps track of your book lists, including what you've read and plan to read, and who sends out reminders about your meetings, along with the host or snack schedules. You may also want to contact your local bookstore and make sure they have enough copies of the book for your group. It's helpful to set a consistent time and place for meetings, so that you do not have to go through the process of scheduling each meeting. While the living room is an obvious choice for a place to meet, you can also consider such places as a bookstore, library, restaurant, or community centre.

Information from www.bordersstores.co.uk - with thanks.

Shetland Library runs Lerwick Book Group, and a lunchtime classics book group. We are also happy to give advice and publicity to anyone wishing to start up their own group. The library has multiple copies of some books and may be able to supply a whole group if you give us advance notice. Contact Marghie West at the Library for more information. marghie.west@shetland.gov.uk or 01595 743868.