

BOOK GROUP GUIDELINES

There are many terrific reasons for starting or taking part in a book group. Book groups motivate people to read and build a community around reading. Participants often move out of their reading comfort zone because they are likely to read books they normally wouldn't pick up. Book groups encourage active instead of passive reading because participants analyze the content of a book. Reading to discern themes, symbols, and imagery as well as character analysis takes effort and the resulting discussion (sometimes debate) can be affirming, enlightening, challenging and usually rewarding. Members of book groups often provide emotional support to each other. Snacks are usually involved which is always a bonus.

Below are some basic guidelines and suggestions for running a book group. Don't feel like you have to follow all of them, but they can help you keep your group on track, bring everyone into the discussion, keep things neutral (avoid judgement), and encourage active reading. It's best to incorporate these practices when the book group is just starting out, but don't feel like you can't make suggestions along these lines if yours is already established.

Purpose and Structure

- The point is to read books and discuss them, not to decide whether you like or dislike the book
- The optimal size for a book group is 10 to 12 people, and no fewer than 6

Discussion Starters

- "What did you think of the book?" is an ambiguous question to start with, and isn't really the point of the book group. Leave that question for the end
- Don't worry if the discussion starts slowly - that's normal
- Have info about the book or author BUT don't start with that information

Keeping the Discussion Going

- When people go off topic, pull them back with a question like, "What would the character or author say about that?"
- Make room for people who are slow to participate - "Annie, it looked like you have something to add..."
- Arranging chairs in a circle encourages participation

- Respect silence as a necessary part of a good, thought provoking discussion
- Although the leader is responsible for keeping the discussion moving, you should speak the least

Other tips

- Do your best to keep your comments and facial expression neutral
- Don't hold back on spoilers for people who didn't finish the book
- The best books for book groups:
 - Ambiguous endings
 - Raise important issues (social issues, death, development, identity)
 - Character based

Guidelines if you use predefined questions for your group

- Place the questions in a container for random selection
- Start with an opening question, then pick a question at random
- Have everyone bring a question - this motivates people to read actively