

# Setting up your reading group

The South East Libraries Reading Development Partnership is supported by:



## **What is a reading group?**

A reading group is a group of people who meet regularly to discuss books they have all been reading. Groups range from friends who know each other to organised groups set up in libraries and bookshops.

Discussion about books is not high brow. It's about sharing personal experiences about the book you have read, your favourite bits, how it made you feel, whether or not you liked the characters etc. It doesn't even matter if you don't manage to finish the book, just come along and hear what others have to say. It's all about relaxing and having fun.

## **How do I set up a reading group?**

The easiest way is to start with friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances. However, your local library will promote your group by displaying a poster, or you could also try your local bookshop, workplace, cafes etc.

By attracting people you don't know, you are likely to be introduced to books and authors that are new to you.

## **How many members should a group have?**

The average reading group has 6 to 10 members. This allows for a really good discussion, from several different points of view, and should allow for everyone to be able to make a contribution. Also the size won't inhibit shyer members.

## **Where to meet and when?**

Your local library may be able to offer you meeting space. Some groups meet in local bookshops, in each other's homes, village halls or pubs. It has to be a venue that will be comfortable, accessible and relaxing for all members.

If it is in people's homes, make sure there is enough room to accommodate everyone, and that everyone takes a turn with the hosting where possible, so that no one person has to cope with the catering and clearing up afterwards.

Getting everyone together for an initial meeting is always difficult, but try and gauge what time of day, and day of the week suits the majority. Use that, time for the first meeting, and then when you have that initial gathering you can discuss future dates and times.

## **Organising your first meeting**

Try to make the first meeting really relaxing and informal. (A glass of wine often helps). Use the ice breaker questions below, to get discussion flowing. It might be an idea to ask people to bring along their all time favourite book, or a book that they really can't get into to start of the conversation.

When everyone has had a chance to get to know each other, consider:

- 1 How often you want to meet? Monthly? Six weekly? It has to be a pattern of meetings that will give everyone a chance to get hold of the book you choose and read it. Monthly usually works well.
- 2 What time of day do people want to meet?
- 3 What will your venue be?
- 4 How long will you meet for? On average groups meet for an hour to an hour and a half.
- 5 Do you want to have refreshments?
- 6 Who will lead the discussion? It's often good to get members to take turns in doing this.
- 7 What kind of group will you be? Men/women only? Will you just read specific genres? Crime/fantasy etc, or will you choose a wide variety of books?
- 8 Will you all, always read the same book? Or will you discuss genres, themes, books by the same authors etc
- 9 Decide on what book you want to read for your next meeting. Try to choose something that is readily available from your library or bookshop. Also, look at our "Which books to choose" section below.

Remember there are no rights or wrongs to running a reading group. It's your group, and it should be an enjoyable experience!

## **"Ice breakers" for your first meeting**

- 1 When and where do you like to read?
- 2 What is your favourite book?
- 3 What is your favourite character?
- 4 Who do you talk to about what you've read?
- 5 Do you ever read the last page before you've got to the end?
- 6 Which book have you always meant to read, but never got round to?
- 7 Do you ever sit up late to finish a book?
- 8 Do you re-read old favourites?
- 9 Do you read in public places?
- 10 Do you have lots of books on the go at once?
- 11 What books do you tend to avoid?
- 12 What books do you remember from your childhood?
- 13 What book would you take to a desert Island?

## What your local library can do for your Reading Group

Your local library service can offer:

- 1 Multiple copies of books – normally 6 copies in paperback only
- 2 Lists of books specifically available for Reading Groups
- 3 Eg Free reservations
- 4 Eg Books for loan for 4 weeks
- 5 Eg No fines
- 6 Advice on stock availability
- 7 Library staff input to discussions where appropriate
- 8 Library staff advice on book availability and book related matters

However, your group will need to:

- 1 Think about the books you would like to read in advance. Unfortunately there may be waiting periods for popular titles.
- 2 Decide if all the books be collected from the library by one person, or will each member collect their own copy?

## Choosing books for discussion

There are many ways in which groups can choose their next book. Here are just a few ideas:

- 1 Library reading group lists
- 2 Librarian's choice
- 3 Choice's of group members
- 4 *newbooks* Magazine
- 5 Books that have won prizes eg: Booker, Orange etc
- 6 Books in the media – Richard and Judy Book Lists, Daily Mail book Club etc
- 7 Themed book discussions eg; novels based around childhood, travel, food etc
- 8 Two book by the same author to enable comparison
- 9 A book by an author giving a talk at your local library
- 10 Look at newspaper book reviews
- 11 Consider reviews on websites (see our list of recommended websites)

## **Leading discussions**

This can seem daunting, but it's really just to get the conversation flowing, and to make sure everyone has a chance to express their thoughts.

The main problems that can arise are if someone dominates the discussion, or shy people feel unable to say anything.

You could do any of the following:

- 1 make a few notes if you are leading the discussion; the themes, characters etc
- 2 Go round all group members to get an initial reaction
- 3 Ask the person who recommended the book to give a brief introduction
- 4 Make sure questions are open ended
- 5 Ask people why they didn't like the book
- 6 How did the book make people feel?
- 7 Consider the style of writing
- 8 What issues did the book raise?
- 9 Would you read anything else by the same author? Has anyone already read other books by the same person – how do they compare?

If the conversation founders, you could ask what other books people have read since the last meeting. Have people seen any good reviews? Watched films based on books?

Remember there's no right or wrong. Opinions may differ greatly!

## **Suggested books for discussion**

The following titles have been widely discussed and enjoyed by reading groups:

- 1 I know why the caged bird sings by Maya Angelou
- 2 Alias Grace by Margaret Atwood
- 3 Captain Corelli's Mandolin by Louis De Bernieres
- 4 The girl with the pearl earring by Tracey Chevalier
- 5 The crimson petal and the white by Michel Faber
- 6 Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks
- 7 Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier
- 8 Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden
- 9 Snow falling on cedars by David Guterson
- 10 The curious incident of the dog in the night time by Mark Haddon
- 11 Miss Smilla's feeling for snow by Peter Hoeg
- 12 Long Way Down by Nick Hornby
- 13 The poisonwood bible by Barbara Kingsolver
- 14 English Passengers by Matthew Kneale
- 15 To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
- 16 No 1 Ladies Detective Agency by Alexander McCall Smith
- 17 Angela's Ashes by Frank McCourt
- 18 Enduring Love by Ian Mckewan
- 19 The Time Travellers Wife by Audrey Niffenegger
- 20 Star of the Sea by Joseph O'Connor
- 21 Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Riuz Zafon
- 22 The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold
- 23 The Bookseller of Kabul by Anne Seirstad
- 24 The Reader by Bernhard Schlink
- 25 Toast by Nigel Slater
- 26 White Teeth by Zadie Smith
- 27 The Colour by Rose Tremain
- 28 Fingersmith by Sarah Waters
- 29 Oranges are not the only fruit by Janette Winterson

## Websites

[www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) – useful for reviews and synopsis of the story

[www.bloomsbury.com/readingclub](http://www.bloomsbury.com/readingclub) - general information for groups including reader's guides

[www.bookcrossing.com](http://www.bookcrossing.com) - Book sharing has never been more exciting, than with BookCrossing. "The website goal, simply, is to *make the whole world a library*". The idea is that you read a good book, register it on the website and release it for someone else to read (eg: leave it on a park bench). The site is also packed with reviews...

[www.bookgroup.info](http://www.bookgroup.info) – a virtual reading group, but also providing advice and support for other groups

[www.bookinformation.co.uk](http://www.bookinformation.co.uk) – a site which gives information on forthcoming publications and also details of book prizes

[www.fantasticfiction.co.uk](http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk) – search for information about specific authors

[www.lovereadings.co.uk](http://www.lovereadings.co.uk) - specialises in offering free downloads of the first chapters of all their featured books across a variety of genres

[www.newbooksmag.com](http://www.newbooksmag.com) – this site compliments the *newbooks* magazine mentioned in the "other resources to get you started" section. The site features 800+ book reviews from readers in other reading groups

<http://readers.penguin.co.uk/> - suggested reading, advice for reading groups, interaction with other groups, and reading related events

<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/readersgroup/> - suggested reading, reading group guides, advice for reading groups, interaction with other groups, and reading related events

[www.readinggroups.co.uk](http://www.readinggroups.co.uk) - suggested reading, advice for reading groups, interaction with other groups, and reading related events

[www.readinggroupguides.com](http://www.readinggroupguides.com) – many guides to discussing specific titles, and access to reading groups who have read the same book

[www.whichbook.net](http://www.whichbook.net) – Gives readers an enjoyable and intuitive way to find books to match their mood.

Also don't forget to look at your local library website. You can find your local service listed at: [www.iwight.com/thelibrary](http://www.iwight.com/thelibrary)

## **Other resources to “get you started”**

### ***Newbooks***

This is a magazine specifically for readers and reading groups, packed full of reviews, recommendations and interviews with authors talking about books and reading. It's published 6 times a year

Please also see the *newbooks* website: [www.newbooksmag.com](http://www.newbooksmag.com) .

The publishers of *newbooks* are happy to send any new reading group a “starter pack”, including an introductory copy of the magazine, and a cross section of books featured in the magazine for each member of your group (to one address), absolutely free!

Please contact Guy Pringle via the website or by

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### **The Reading Group Book by Jenny Hartley**

This book is a result of a survey of 350 reading groups, and gives lots of useful information about resources and books chosen by reading groups.

### **Essential guide to reading groups**

This book contains reading guides for the discussion of some books, by posing questions about characters, plot etc. There is also information about authors and suggested further reading.

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### **Isle of Wight Libraries**

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