

Tips for Book Discussions

The Group

A book discussion group does not need to be huge. When there are more than a dozen people discussing a book, some people may not get the chance to share their viewpoint. However, four or five people may be too few, especially if a member misses the meeting or if a particular book does not interest someone.

Many groups find their members from neighborhoods, offices, or other communities where people have a lot in common. Diverse groups can be successful and interesting too. What is important is that all members feel free to express their opinions and ideas.

The Book

What makes a book worth discussion? A book that's well written and engaging. A book that leads the reader to explore his or her own thoughts and feelings and that has characters who think, change, and grow.

Many excellent books are driven more by plot than by character, and end by tying up the plot so neatly that there is little left to discuss once the book is read. For this reason, some very enjoyable types of books (mystery, science fiction, western, and romance) may not always provide for rich discussions.

Ask the reference librarian for suggestions. They can show you how to use online tools such as Novelist to identify titles for consideration.

Read for Discussion

As you read the book, note questions that come to mind or events, characters or language that interest you. Think about the themes and characters. Think about how the author has structured the book. Use bookmarks, or make a list of page numbers, so you can quickly find a passage during the discussion. And just because it's the reading group book, don't be afraid to dislike the book. Not every book is for every reader, and a variety of feelings about a book make for engaging discussion.

The Discussion

There are no hard and fast rules for a good book discussion. Usually a discussion leader will prepare a set of 10 to 15 questions about the book that will get the discussion started and keep it moving. A list of questions is provided with every Book Kit.

Some reading groups value discussions that relate the book to the reader's life experiences; others prefer to keep the focus on the book.

Good discussion topics include:

- Characters
- Story Lines
- Character Actions
- Social Implications
- Symbolism
- Author's Purpose
- Believability

- Emotional Response of the Reader
- Good or Bad Endings
- Quality of writing and style
- How the book relates to other books, or to history
- Narrative and Point of View
- Themes
- Time and place

The Setting

Successful book discussions can happen anywhere from a home to a mall food court. Some groups include food and drinks during or after discussions. Any place where you can talk with a small group is the right place.

More Information

Talk with a library staff member; we'll be happy to help you prepare and get started with your own book club!