

The Reading Pack

A reading group or book club is a great way to share your love of reading and discover exciting new reads. There are all sorts of reading groups, meeting in libraries, pubs, cafes, and private houses or online. Just choose the one that is right for you – or start one of your own.

This pack has been developed by West Midlands Readers' Network and contains hints and tips on setting up and running a reading group as well as ideas for reading activities you can enjoy. West Midlands Readers' Network is a partnership of librarians, publishers, readers, booksellers and venues dedicated to promoting reading in the region through events and activities.

West Midlands Readers' Network

For more information, see www.wmreadersnetwork.co.uk



Getting started - First meeting

The first meeting is all about group members getting to know each other both as people and as readers and discussing what the group is going to do at future meetings.

Everyone will have different reading experiences and different expectations from the group. Some people may be unsure about how reading groups are run and may feel that they are not particularly “well read.” It’s important to reassure members that everyone is entitled to their own views and that it’s OK not to like a book!

Most of all, the first meeting – and every meeting - needs to be a fun social occasion that everyone enjoys.

Here are some ideas to get everyone talking at the first meeting:

What are you reading?

Ask everyone to bring the book they are currently reading and say a few words about it. This is a good ice-breaker and helps group members to get to know each other.

Desert island books

Which three books would you want to have with you if you were marooned on a desert island? Would they be fiction/fantasy to help you cope with the situation, or would you want practical books to help you survive?

Reel reads

How well do books adapt to the cinema? Is it better to read the book before seeing the film or vice versa? Can the film or TV series ever be as good as the book? Has a film or TV series ever made you want to read the book?

Children’s favourites

What did you like to read when you were young? Can you remember any special books from childhood? If you have children or grandchildren do you share stories with them?

How to run your reading group

Where to meet

Reading groups can meet anywhere – your local library, someone’s house, the local pub or cafe. It’s important that everyone feels comfortable about where the group meets. Libraries are a great place for groups to meet as you are surrounded by books!

What to read

There are lots of options.....

- The group could all read the same book and then discuss it – this is one of the most popular reading group activities
- Everyone could bring a different book to each meeting
- The group could read different books by the same author
- The group could read a particular genre

Choosing your books

The most democratic way of doing this is to let members take turns in choosing the books. This will ensure that there is a wide range of books, and everyone gets the chance to choose their preferred genre.

Getting your books

You may be able to get your group’s books from your local library. Some library authorities have special reading group tickets and special collections of reading group sets.

Other things to consider

How big should the group be? A very large group can make it difficult to have a good discussion but does bring a wide range of opinions to the table.

Who will lead the group? The group will need someone to do the organisation and take responsibility for communicating with members. It’s also good to have someone to facilitate the discussion at meetings – this could be the person who has chosen the book for that particular meeting.

How to run your reading group

Online information

Reading Groups for Everyone – www.readinggroups.org is a website dedicated to reading groups. Run by the Reading Agency in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians, it's a key resource for reading groups. You can find your nearest group, register a group and take advantage of free promotions, competitions and author visits. There is also lots of advice on finding good reads and running your group.

There are lots of other good websites with information about authors and books, as well as online reading groups and magazines.

Some library authorities welcome reviews of books on their websites and may have specific reading group pages.

Many publishers' websites have a reading group section with author interviews, reading guides and sometimes offers of free books, quizzes and competitions.

Talking about books

Usually, readers have no problems talking about books, but here are a few suggestions to get the discussion going:

- Did you like the look of the book? Would you have chosen to read it?
Was the book what you expected from the cover and blurb?
- Did it get off to a slow start, or were you hooked straight away?
- Who was your favourite/least favourite character? Were there any characters you could identify with?
- Which relationship was most interesting and why?
- What did you think of the ending? Was it what you expected?
How did you feel when you'd finished?
- Is it a book you'd recommend? If so, why? Would you read another title by this author?

Problem solving

Reading groups are generally very happy groups, but, just occasionally, there are problems. Here are some of the most common ones:

The dominant member

This is the person who likes the sound of his or her voice and hogs all of the time. The best thing to do with this person is to let them have their say early on, and then you are justified in asking them to let other people have a chance during the rest of the session. If all else fails, it can be worth taking the person aside at the end of the meeting and just explain politely, that, although you value their opinion, it is important to let the other members of the group in. You may risk losing a member, but not dealing with this situation may risk losing more members!

The shy member

Sometimes you get someone who never says anything. The worst thing you can do with this person is turn the spotlight on them. Some people just like to sit and listen, which is OK. If they are not contributing because they feel excluded from the discussion, you need to facilitate space for them to have their say. It can be a good idea to break out about ten minutes before the end of the session so that group members can chat informally to each other outside the group structure. This can often encourage quiet members to come out of their shell and become more confident about voicing opinions.

Tension in the group

Most reading groups are very civilised, but, just occasionally, personal arguments can build between members. If you feel this is starting to happen, it's worth splitting the group in two (keeping the antagonists apart) and having two discussions then comparing notes at the end.

Liven up your reading group

If your group has been going for a while and doing the same things, it might start to feel a bit jaded. Here are some ideas to put some new life into the group:

- Change some aspect of the group – place, time, books
- Link up with other reading groups to share ideas for books – look at www.readinggroups.org to find other groups in your area
- If you link with another local group, try having a joint meeting
- Invite guest readers – e.g. local writers, library staff, booksellers, younger or older readers
- Follow a literary prize. Get the group to read the shortlisted books and select your own winner. You can find a list of book prizes at www.fantasticfiction.co.uk. Some prizes create opportunities for reading groups to shadow the judges. You can usually find details on the Reading Groups for Everyone website.
- Go on a reading trip – to the theatre or a literature event

Reading for all the family

Most public libraries run reading activities for children and young people. These may include rhyme times and story times, activities for under 5s, family storytelling and book groups. These enable parents and children to come together in the library to share stories and reading adventures. There are also several national schemes for children and families. Your local library may be taking part in them:

Summer Reading Challenge

Every year during the summer school holidays, the Summer Reading Challenge inspires thousands of children all over the country to visit their local library, read up to six books and receive stickers, certificates and prizes. There are also opportunities for young people to become Summer Reading Challenge volunteers. The Summer Reading Challenge website is available all year round with lots of reading ideas and activities.

www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk



Chatterbooks

Chatterbooks encourages children aged between 4 and 12 to visit libraries with their families to read and talk about books.

www.readingagency.org.uk/children/chatterbooks



Bookstart

Bookstart offers the gift of free books to all children at two key ages before they start school to inspire a love of reading and to help families read together.



bookstart

Reading for blind and partially sighted people

Public libraries support a range of reading activities for blind and partially sighted readers, including lending audio and large print books. Some libraries run reading/listening groups.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) runs a national library service for people with sight loss. They offer a wide choice of fiction and non-fiction in audio, braille and giant print for adults and children. They also have a specialist Reader Services Team to provide advice and support for readers and help with reading choices.

Your local library may be able to access information and books direct from RNIB. If not, they will be able to direct you to their services. Visit www.rnib.org.uk

The Bee Aware project is funded by the Library and Information Commission to improve access to library materials for blind and visually impaired people. Libraries can send a request on behalf of their reader, not only through the existing inter lending network but also to four other agencies i.e. Calibre, NLB (national Library for the Blind), RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) and TNAUK. (Talking Newspaper Association of the UK). To qualify for free requests through the Bee Aware scheme customers have to be either registered blind or partially sighted.

Websites for reading groups

www.wmreadersnetwork.co.uk

A regional network offering information, support and advice for reading groups.

www.readinggroups.org

Reading Agency managed website dedicated to reading groups.

www.fantasticfiction.co.uk

Site with details of 350,000 books. Ideal place to look for your next read.

www.lovereadng.co.uk/genre/grp/Reading-Groups

Offers opening extracts to print off and discount for groups ordering five or more copies of a title

www.bookgroup.info

Reviews, recommendations, book group directory and forums

www.theguardian.com/books/series/reading-group

Online reading group

www.faber.co.uk/reading-groups

Publisher site with downloadable reading guides and newsletter

www.bloomsbury.com/uk/communities/book-groups

Publisher site with reading guides and newsletter

www.peoplesbookprize.com

A national competition aimed at finding, supporting and promoting new and undiscovered works. Titles are nominated by publishers and voted for by the public.

www.openingthebook.com/whichbook

A fun way to choose your next book. The site recommends books based on a series of parameters set by the reader.

www.poetryonloan.org.uk

Poetry promotions, ideas and events from around the West Midlands region.

Websites for reading groups

www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk

Available all year round, the summer Reading Challenge website features Book Sorter – where children can choose books recommended by other children, Reading Club, where children can find out more about their favourite authors and Bringing Books to Life – celebrities read from their favourite books. There are also lots of games and competitions.

www.booktrust.org.uk/books/bookfinder

An easy way to find the perfect book for you, your family and friends. **Bookfinder** enables you to search for books by age and theme.

www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/shadowingsite

Chosen by librarians the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway medals are awarded annually for outstanding books for children and young people. This site is ideal for young people's reading groups who want to shadow both awards. It is packed full of resources and ideas and there is a great archive of past winners and shortlisted books.

Public libraries and reading groups

Public libraries across the region provide a focus for reading in local communities and may be able to offer support for reading groups and, possibly a space for your group to meet. Some library authorities provide a reading group sets service, enabling reading groups to borrow multiple copies of a title.

Libraries often hold author events, poetry readings and other reading related activities, so it's worth finding out what's happening in your area. These events and activities are a great way of linking up with other local readers.

World Book Night takes place each year on 23rd April and is a celebration of books and reading. Readers can sign up to be book givers and receive free books to give to other readers, and there are events in libraries across the country. For more details see www.worldbooknight.org



West Midlands Readers' Network supports reading groups across the region. Working alongside your library, the network organises events such as readers' days and author visits, plus other exciting projects bringing readers and writers together. For more details, visit www.wmreadersnetwork.co.uk

West Midlands Readers' Network