

# Setting up your reading group

## **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 you 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:

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ What time of day do people want to meet?
- ◆ What will your venue be?
- ◆ How long will you meet for? On average groups meet for an hour to an hour and a half.
- ◆ Do you want to have refreshments?
- ◆ Who will lead the discussion? It's often good to get members to take turns in doing this.
- ◆ 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?
- ◆ Will you all, always read the same book? Or will you discuss genres, themes, books by the same authors etc
- ◆ 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**

- ◆ When and where do you like to read?
- ◆ What is your favourite book?
- ◆ What is your favourite character?
- ◆ Who do you talk to about what you've read?
- ◆ Do you ever read the last page before you've got to the end?
- ◆ Which book have you always meant to read, but never got round to?
- ◆ Do you ever sit up late to finish a book?
- ◆ Do you re-read old favourites?
- ◆ Do you read in public places?
- ◆ Do you have lots of books on the go at once?
- ◆ What books do you tend to avoid?
- ◆ What books do you remember from your childhood?
- ◆ 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:

- ◆ Multiple copies of books – normally between 6 and 10
- ◆ Lists of books specifically available for Reading Groups
- ◆ Free reservations
- ◆ Books for loan for 4 weeks
- ◆ No fines on reading group books
- ◆ Advice on stock availability
- ◆ Library staff input to discussions where appropriate
- ◆ Library staff advice on book availability and book related matters

However, your group will need to:

- ◆ Think about the books you would like to read in advance. Unfortunately there may be waiting periods for popular titles.
- ◆ 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:

- ◆ Library reading group lists
- ◆ Librarian's choice
- ◆ Choice's of group members
- ◆ Books that have won prizes eg: Booker, Orange etc
- ◆ Books in the media – eg: TV bookclub titles
- ◆ Themed book discussions eg; novels based around childhood, travel, food etc
- ◆ Two book by the same author to enable comparison
- ◆ A book by an author giving a talk at your local library or bookshop
- ◆ Look at newspaper book reviews
- ◆ Consider reviews on 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:

- ◆ make a few notes if you are leading the discussion; the themes, characters etc
- ◆ Go round all group members to get an initial reaction
- ◆ Ask the person who recommended the book to give a brief introduction
- ◆ Make sure questions are open ended
- ◆ Ask people why they didn't like the book
- ◆ How did the book make people feel?
- ◆ Consider the style of writing
- ◆ What issues did the book raise?
- ◆ 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!