

So, You Want to Set Up a Book Club ...

You love reading and you'd love the chance to chat about some of the books you've enjoyed, but you haven't managed to find a book club nearby. You're not madly keen on hosting it at home, which is probably what has been putting you off. Why not chat to the staff at your local library? Library based book clubs are a wonderful way to establish a reading community and to support a love of books and the joy of reading. Most libraries would be able to offer space for you to host a book club or, at the very least, would be able to give you advice on setting up a book club and order enough titles to get you started.

First Things First

Before anything else, you need to decide what you hope to get out of this club. Do you want to have some quality time with friends, meet new people or forge stronger bonds with people at work? Will you read fiction or non-fiction? These details will help you figure out who to invite and how to proceed.

Decide Who to Invite

Start by deciding who you want to ask to join. Girls Night Out book clubs are some of the most popular, but book clubs of all kinds are popping up. Invite neighbours or friends from your area. You can start a work reading group. Keep in mind where you plan to host the club when deciding who to invite.

Choosing a Book

Choosing a book that lends itself to a good book club discussion is important, preferably one that sparks interest, curiosity, and conversation among book club members. Encourage all members to suggest/nominate books for discussion. Try and vary the genre and writing style of the books you are reading to keep the group fresh. Either vote on the group's next read or take turns making the decision.

We offer some suggestions here that other Irish book clubs have enjoyed (or not, as the case may be!):

The Art of Reading Book Club – a monthly discussion hosted by the former Laureate for Irish Fiction, Colm Tóibín. Recorded discussions are available to view:

<https://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Literature/Laureate-for-Irish-Fiction/The-Art-of-Reading-Book-Club/>

RTÉ's Book Club programme (formerly called Page Turners) has some great selections:

<https://www.rte.ie/culture/2024/0119/1427463-join-the-book-club-rtes-literary-gab-fest-turns-the-page/>

Meath Library offers Book Club Kits to any interested book clubs. Check out the link for some of their past reads: <https://www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/book-club-kits>

Club Leabhar is an online Irish language book club. As well as being a member of ClubLeabhar.com, you can take part in the activities of one of the Irish language book clubs throughout the country and abroad: <https://www.clubleabhar.com/>

The Rick O'Shea Book Club is probably one of Ireland's most famous Book Clubs: <http://www.rickoshea.ie/bookclub/>

Kerry Library Book Club Collection can be seen here: <https://www.kerrylibrary.ie/book-club-collection.html>

Check out what Castlebar Library Book Club has been reading since 2005, and how they've rated those reads out of five stars: <https://www.mayo.ie/library/services/book-clubs>

South Dublin Libraries offers books on loan to books clubs operating in any South Dublin Library or the South Dublin Council area. Check out their titles here: <https://www.sdcc.ie/en/services/sport-and-recreation/libraries/explore-collections/book-club-titles/book-club-titles.html>

Cavan Library's Summer Reads compilation has something to satisfy everyone's reading tastes: <https://www.cavanlibrary.ie/explore-read/books-readers/recommended-reads/>

Goodreads is a very comprehensive source for book reviews and recommendations on what to read next: <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Ordering the Book from the Library

When it comes to getting copies of the book you choose, you have a few options. Donegal Library Service offers a Book club card that will allow you to borrow up to 40 items at a time. If you are happy to take responsibility for ensuring all items are returned, this may work well for your book club. You can also suggest that each book club member reserves their own copy of the book – anyone who is not a library member can join easily and quickly for free.

Donegal Library Service also provides a Book Club Stock List. Your local library can provide the group with this list or it also available to view at: <https://donegal.spydus.ie/cgi-bin/spydus.exe/MSGTRN/WPAC/HOME>

The group can select from this list at any time, but please be advised that if you have chosen a very new or extremely popular title, it is unlikely you will be able to get it in time for your next book club as there are usually waiting lists for the most popular titles. Your librarian can check if a requested title is in stock and currently available for

loan. Once the title is ordered the whole set is sent to the designated library for collection.

Book Discussion

You want your book club discussion to be fun and engaging and provide an opportunity to discuss the book. It's important to ensure that everyone feels comfortable joining the conversation and sharing their thoughts if they choose to do so.

Don't worry if there is dissension or debate – often the best and most enjoyable book club evenings happen when everybody is NOT on the same page about a particular book. However, it may be useful to have a couple of ground rules in terms of discussion such as ensuring everyone has a chance to speak, respecting diverse viewpoints, adhering to the 'one voice at a time' principle. Discussion should always be respectful and constructive. It's very important to have a leader in the group - someone calling the shots and to keep the energy going.

A helpful starting point might be to start off the meeting with some initial reactions to the book, what people's experience was of reading the book, what aspects resonated or did not resonate with members about the story/content.

There are many books where discussion guides/questions are available online but it can also be good to allow for impromptu discussion as this allows for some of the more unexpected connections. Allow the discussion/conversation to grow organically in order to have a more authentic and engaging experience as members may like to talk about how the book made them feel, situations and events they were reminded of in their own lives or indeed how the book relates to current events going on around them in the country/world.

The discussion need not be of academic proportions (unless of course you want it to be!). But it is a good idea to have some structure to the meeting all the same. Options include:

- a discussion led by a group member with the leader rotating each meeting
- taking turns to give opinions on the book followed by debate/discussion
- following a set of discussion questions such as the ones provided by <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides>
- selecting some published reviews (both good and bad) of your chosen title and use them as a starting point for discussion. Reviews can be found in newspapers, publisher's websites, Amazon and Goodreads.

Discussion may include references to the book's themes, characters, plot and style. Members may have noted quotes, passages or scenes that they have particularly enjoyed or disliked or have stood out to them that they would like explored further at the meeting.

While members should be encouraged to try and read every book choice, there should be no pressure to continue reading or finish the book if the book is not being enjoyed.

Scheduling

The Book Club meetings should be held once a month (although there are some that meet every six weeks – setting dates a few months in advance). If you go for monthly, it's best to opt for a regular schedule – e.g. first Thursday of every month or last Wednesday of every month. Avoid Mondays as Bank Holidays can throw your schedule out of synch.

Setting Up an Online Book Club

Penguin Books run through some of the options here [How to set up an online book club \(penguin.co.uk\)](https://penguin.co.uk). They point out that “you'll most easily be able to recreate the feel of an in-person book club if you can see the people you're talking to. Things like Zoom, FaceTime and Google Hangouts will allow you to see your book club and are a great way to connect. But maybe you're camera shy, in which case it's worth thinking about setting up a group on WhatsApp, or on Slack if you already use it for work, where your book club can hold its discussions. These options also work if all your members can't "meet" at the same time – the discussion can continue even if you're not all present, and people can catch up on what's been talked about in their own time.”

Book Club Questions

General Questions

1. What did you like best about this book?
2. What did you like least about this book?
3. What other books did this remind you of?
4. Which characters in the book did you like best?
5. Which characters did you like least?
6. If you were making a movie of this book, who would you cast?
7. Share a favourite quote from the book. Why did this quote stand out?
8. What other books by this author have you read? How did they compare to this book?
9. Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
10. What feelings did this book evoke for you?
11. What did you think of the book's length? If it's too long, what would you cut? If too short, what would you add?
12. What songs does this book make you think of? Create a book group playlist together!
13. If you got a chance to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?
14. Which character in the book would you most like to meet?

15. Which places in the book would you most like to visit?
16. What do you think of the book's title? How does it relate to the book's contents? What other title might you choose?
17. What do you think of the book's cover? How well does it convey what the book is about? If the book has been published with different covers, which one do you like best?
18. What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was he or she trying to get across?
19. How original and unique was this book?
20. If you could hear this same story from another person's point of view, who would you choose?
21. What artist would you choose to illustrate this book? What kind of illustrations would you include?

FOR FICTION

22. Did this book seem realistic?
23. How well do you think the author built the world in the book?
24. 24. Did the characters seem believable to you? Did they remind you of anyone?
25. Did the book's pace seem too fast/too slow/just right?
26. If you were to write fanfic about this book, what kind of story would you want to tell?

FOR NONFICTION

27. What did you already know about this book's subject before you read this book?
28. What new things did you learn?
29. What questions do you still have?
30. What else have you read on this topic, and would you recommend these books to others?
31. What do you think about the author's research? Was it easy to see where the author got his or her information? Were the sources credible?

FOR MEMOIR

32. What aspects of the author's story could you most relate to?
33. How honest do you think the author was being?
34. What gaps do you wish the author had filled in? Were there points where you thought he shared too much?

35. Think about the other people in the book besides the author. How would you feel to have been depicted in this way?
36. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story?

FOR SHORT STORIES/ESSAYS

37. Which short story/essay did you like best?
38. Which short story/essay did you like least?
39. What similarities do these stories share? How do they tie together?
40. Do you think any of the stories could be expanded into a full-length book?