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Book clubs help us read more

Why not start your very own book club? I belong to what I refer to as “my personal book club” as well as the library’s Books for Lunch club, each a unique kind of book club and each indispensable to me. I’ve asked experienced book club people what advice they would give to start a new one. Here are some thoughts.

Have structure. How often will you meet? Where? Will you eat? Drink? How will you choose a reading list? Who will lead the discussion? There’s no wrong answer to this, but people need to take the organization of your club in hand and suggest/negotiate what will work.

For example, my personal book club started out meeting once a month. But things change over twenty years, and now we meet nine months each year. We meet in one another’s homes and started out serving dinner. Again, we’ve changed that a couple years ago to dessert only. Whoever hosts one meeting chooses the book to be discussed at the next meeting.

Hand pick your members. The library Books for Lunch club is the exception to this. That’s a come one, come all experience, and we love it when lots of people show up. The library has the space and provides food, and we don’t all read and discuss the same book.

But that’s the exception. For the most part, this is a social event as well as a reading discussion, and if you want to go the long haul, invite people you think will mix well in terms of open lively discussion. More than one of you should do this so you are drawing in a variety of people. You don’t need to think alike, vote alike, or go to the same church. But collectively the group should have a vibe that keeps things both fun and interesting. Have a top number and recruit. I was asked to join my book club and didn’t know most people in it. They are now great friends. We have twelve members only. I’ve known successful book clubs with five and with fifty.

Develop a book discussion method. I’m not a fan of the questions at the back of books, but some people love them and use them effectively. You need some discussion at the beginning how to conduct discussions. Keep rules to a few key ones that seem important. One of ours is, “It’s fine to criticize a book but don’t criticize anyone for picking it.” There’s a big difference. (That’s our “no whining” rule. But be honest about the book itself.)

Have some variety in your reading choices. Some book clubs have annual themes (American classics; southern literature; celebrity memoirs), and some don’t. Those with themes

can often plan a year's reading at once allowing people to read ahead. Others, like my book club, don't. Whatever anyone wants to pick, we read. We don't have a limit on length or genre or time period. We read fiction and non-fiction and normally it's contemporary. But we do have variety. People need to be willing to read books that they usually wouldn't and do so with an open mind. This is a big benefit of being in a book club.

Don't shame your own members. Life gets away from all of us sometimes. No shaming if someone didn't get the book read. Don't get competitive with refreshments. Be happy to have whatever is served. Don't brow beat those who disagree with your assessment or interpretation of the book, but debate is fine.

Have fun. Get your book club going. It will increase the fun in your life, and you'll read more. The library has some good ideas to help support your book club, so stay tuned in the future for news about that.

See you at the Library!

Upcoming Events: Friday Night at the Movies for Adults at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 1 "Little Women."
Zombies Nerf War for Teens Sat. Feb. 2 at 6:00 p.m. **Part 2 Nature Series – The Secret Life of Skunks** Tues. Feb. 5 at 6:30 p.m. **Pout Pout Fish Party** Sat. Feb. 9 from 10 – 12. Keep track of events on our website, FB, and Twitter.