

The Reading Pack

"Books can be read in isolation, but when shared with others they are much more enjoyable"

A reading group or book club is a great way of sharing the pleasure of reading and inspiring you to try something new. A huge range of books, magazines, tapes and CDs is available; something for everyone, whatever their age or interests.

There are different types of book groups from reading chains to listening groups; some meet in libraries, or at work, others meet in private houses, pubs or cafes, or on-line. So choose which works best for you – or start one of your own.

Building on the work of the Reading Agency and East Midlands Libraries, West Midlands public libraries have produced this pack. It contains information, hints and tips on running a group and what the library can do for you. Your library offers a range of services to support your reading group, including: information about local groups; advice in the selection of books; free book loans; ideas for activities and a friendly place to meet.

In addition the West Midlands Readers' Network – a partnership of public libraries, bookshops, publishers and venues – also organises activities for readers.

(See further on for details)

So good luck, enjoy yourself and do ask library staff for help.



Getting started: First meeting

- Discuss how your reading group might work. People may be unsure about how book groups run, or have different ideas, so you could talk about what you expect to happen.
- It's all about sharing your reading experiences - what members thought about the book, story or poem; how it made you feel, where you read it; would you recommend it to someone else, did you finish it!
- Everyone is entitled to their own views - don't take it personally if someone totally disagrees with you - the range of opinions is what makes book groups interesting.
- Not everyone will enjoy or even finish every book! but hopefully it will be fun - a social occasion that everyone enjoys, perhaps with tea, coffee and biscuits; a glass of wine or a beer.

Ideas to get you talking.

• Favourite Books

Ask each person to talk about a book, story or poem they've particularly enjoyed. It could be brand new or an old favourite. If you meet in the library, have a look around to find a book you would recommend to someone else.

• Book Covers

Stand up 10 books and discuss the covers – which do you like? Which don't you like? What are the reasons for your choices? Who do you think they're trying to appeal to?

• First Lines

Take the first few lines from several books, and discuss them. Do they make you want to read more? Or do they put you off completely? Why?

Getting Started: First Meeting

- **Desert Island books**

Which 3 books would you take with you if marooned on a desert island? Would they be fiction / fantasy to help you cope with the situation, or practical books which could help you survive? Discuss with the person sitting next to you.

- **Books on screen**

How well do books adapt to the cinema? Is it better to read the book before seeing the film or do you do it the other way round? Can the film ever be as good as the book? Do some film or TV versions make you go and read the book?

- **In the News / Best sellers**

Which books are in the news at the moment? Have you seen any advertised in newspapers, or in shops and libraries? Have you read any best sellers, or prize winning books lately? Do you read books about or by celebrities, sports men / women, or other famous people?

- **Children's Favourites**

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

- **Holiday escapes**

Recommend a book to others in the group which would be good to take on holiday. You could suggest books to match different types of holiday / places: beach reads, city breaks, adventure holidays. Is reading a good book like taking a holiday? What would you put in your travel bag?

- **Room 101 / Books you love to hate**

Which 3 books would you banish to Room 101 and why?

How To Run Your Reading Group

What to read

- Do you all want to read the same book, and then discuss it; or read different books by one author? Or maybe you'd like to choose a particular type of book sometimes – like crime or non-fiction or poetry.
- Many reading groups read the same book, with occasional meetings where they do something different. But you don't have to stick to this model.
- How are you going to select which books to read? You could use any lists of titles provided by your library, or recommended books from a librarian, website, newspapers or friends. Or do you want to take it in turns to choose?
- Some libraries provide sets of books and audio books for readers to borrow from a special reading group collection – just ask library staff. Often they will have a special reading group ticket, which gives you loans for longer than the normal loan period.
- Perhaps your group will read magazines, graphic novels, Manga or children's books.

How To Run Your Reading Group

Other things to consider

- Who would you like to invite? How big should the group be and how often do you want to meet? Many groups meet monthly so they have enough time to read the book; but you can choose how often, which day of the week / times to suit your group.
- The group will need a couple of people to organise it – you may get help from library staff initially, but you will probably be running it yourselves. Some library services can offer support from volunteers for reading activities.
- You need to make sure you know how to order books from the library, how long you can keep them, and how to collect / return them – just ask library staff
- You could also discuss where to meet –will it be in the library, or somewhere else like a café or what about the pub?
- Check if there are any special events for readers going on in your local library. Libraries welcome suggestions from reading groups and are very pleased to have your input and support for visiting author events or readers' days.

Online Information

- There are lots of good websites with information about authors and books, as well as online reading groups and magazines. If you don't have access to the Internet at home, you can use the computers in your library.
- Some library authorities welcome reviews of books on have their own websites.
- Many publisher websites have a reading group section with author interviews, reading guides / suggested questions for discussion, and sometimes offers of free books, quizzes and competitions.

Things To Talk About

- How did your feelings change as you read the story? Did it make you angry, frightened, laugh, or cry?
- Which relationship was most interesting and why?
- Did you get off to a slow start or were you hooked straight away?
- What did you think of the ending? Was it what you expected? How did you feel when you'd finished?
- If you've read a true story, biography or autobiography, did you think it was well told? Did you find out more or less than you wanted about the subject? Have you changed your opinion of them now you've read their story?
- Who was your favourite / least favourite character? Were there any characters you could identify with?
- Did you find some parts of the story more enjoyable than others?
- If the story was set in another time or country, how did that affect you? Was it convincing? Would you want to live in that time or travel to that country / place?
- Is this a book you would recommend, and if so, why? Would you read another title by this author?
- Did you like the cover / look of the book? Would you have chosen to read it, and why (or why not)?
- Did you skip the boring bits or just read the end? If you gave up on the book, can you say why?
- If it was made into a film / TV series, which actors would play the main parts?
- Did it remind you of any other books you have read? Can you think of any other stories with similar ideas, characters or settings?

Just Getting Into Reading?

There is a lot happening in libraries for people new to reading for fun and relaxation. You might like to ask about **Quick Reads**, short books with great stories by well known authors and celebrities. Ideal to pop in your pocket and read on the bus or train, easy to read and swap ideas about with other readers, Quick Reads are just right for people with busy lives.

Or try **First Choice** books at www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk which lists titles chosen for people who are just getting into reading. You can search for titles on every subject, including books to share with your children. You can rate them and add comments too.

And you might want to try the **Six Book Challenge** – an invitation to read six books with incentives along the way and a certificate at the end. See www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

And have you heard about the BBC Learning Campaigns? Public libraries all over the country are linking up with local radio, TV, adult learning centres, trade unions and work places to promote the pleasure of reading. The idea is to encourage people to read more and to share their reading with others

Don't forget, your library is there to help, whatever and whenever you like to read.

Reading for all the family

Most public libraries run reading activities or host book clubs for children and young people. Every year during the long school holidays, the **Summer Reading Challenge** inspires thousands of children all over the country to visit their library, read up to 6 books and receive stickers, certificates and prizes.

Chatter books encourages children aged between four and twelve to visit libraries with their families, read and talk more about books. Every child joining a Chatter books group gets a pack with reading lists, review notes, reading diaries and games.

Some libraries also have book clubs / activities designed for older children and teenagers. Look out for **Headspace** projects which are a new feature in 20 libraries around the country with special areas run by and for teenage readers.

Baby bounce, **Bookstart**, **Bookcrawl**, rhyme times and story times, activities for under 5s, family storytelling and book groups are just some of the ways in which parents and children come together sharing stories and reading adventures in the library, children's centres or community halls. In some places there are Dads Welcome groups.

There is something for everyone, so just ask at your library.

For more information about **Bookstart** go to
www.bookstart.org.uk

For more information about **Chatterbooks** go to:
www.readingagency.org.uk/children/chatterbooks

For more information about **Headspace** go to:
www.readingagency.org.uk/young/headspace

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 to reading/listening groups. Some authorities offer assistance with transport so visually impaired people can join a group at the library to discuss books. Other groups have help from volunteers to run and organise the groups, or offer lifts.

Many reading groups include people with sight loss of different types, and libraries always aim to supply an audio or Large Print format if it is available.

In some groups, members share extracts, stories, poems, or reviews by reading aloud to others.

In addition, the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) runs a national library service for readers with sight loss. They offer a comprehensive range of books and accessible information for children and adults in a range of formats including Braille, Moon, Large print and unabridged audio. Public libraries work closely with RNIB to make these services and formats available to all.

The RNIB Talking Books library provides 14,000 fiction titles, including latest best sellers and old favourites as well as non fiction. Large print is available in 16 point type and they have a growing collection of titles in giant print 24 type. This is a postal service direct to the reader, for which there is a charge.

Public library staff can access information, books and help from RNIB for you, or direct you to their services. RNIB specialist librarians also offer advice to public library staff and individuals, on reading activities for visually impaired readers and how to set up listening groups.

Please ask at your library if you want to find out more.

RNIB Customer Services Team: 0845 762 6843

Minicom: 0845 758 5691

Email: cservices@rnib.org.uk

Reading in public libraries

What Else is Happening?

Rather than being in a regular reading group, some people prefer to drop in occasionally to book cafes or coffee clubs in libraries. These informal sessions bring people together over refreshments, to sit and chat about anything they've read lately - books, magazines, stories, newspapers, radio plays or TV films. Ask at your library if there is a group like that near where you live.

Other readers join a Book Chain organised by the library. This is for people who like to find out what other readers think about books, but perhaps don't have time for regular book group meetings. Each reader in the chain takes a book, reads it, writes a few comments down, and hands it back in at the library. This is passed on to someone else, so each time you get a book you get some comments to go with it. You may agree or disagree with what other people have written, it doesn't matter!

Reading activities also take place outside the library, with library staff or volunteers visiting community groups, health centres, clinics and organisations in the local area to give talks, recommend books or help set up book clubs. If you know of a group of people of any age who'd like to hear more about books and reading, or who may want help setting up their own reading group, just contact your nearest library.

You may be a volunteer who supports a particular group, such as visiting elderly people in sheltered housing or residential care, or disabled/housebound people, or work at a community or day centre; if you like books and reading and want to share your ideas with those you visit or work with, we can help.

West Midlands Readers' Network

The 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. The Network can also help you start your own reading group, and offer support to keep one going. For more details, visit www.westmidlandsreaders.org. You can join the email contact list for updates on what's happening.

Reading together, listening to stories on tape or CD, meeting authors who visit libraries, sharing ideas about books with others – all of these are great ways to relax socially and enjoy yourself.

Web reading guides

Sites for Reading Groups:

www.westmidlandsreaders.org

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

www.bloomsbury.com/readinggroups

Bloomsbury website with reading guides, access to authors and special offers for reading groups.

www.harpercollins.com/Readers/readingGroups.aspx

HarperCollins website for reading groups offers advice, reading guides and suggestions for books.

www.panmacmillan.com/reading%20groups

Pan Macmillan offers special features and book recommendations for reading groups.

www.readers.penguin.co.uk

Penguin site with author interviews, advice on running a reading group, book discussions etc.

www.randomhouse.co.uk

Random House page with ideas and information.

www.poetrysociety.org.uk

The Poetry Society site with reviews, promotions and other ideas, all about poetry.

www.readingagency.org.uk

The Reading Agency is involved in so many of the initiatives in the promotion and enjoyment of books and reading.

<http://www.encompassculture.com>

The British Council website for meeting other reading groups from around the world online. Ask the online reader in residence for advice and join in a web chat.

Web reading guides

Sites for good books:

<http://www.web4readers.wordpress.com>

Linking you to the best websites for readers.

<http://www.lovereadng.co.uk>

Extracts, reviews and information about new books, with lots of ideas for what to read next.

<http://www.whatshouldireadnext.com>

Search for other readers' recommendations by authors and book titles.

<http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk>

All you ever needed to know about your favourite authors and characters.

<http://www.richardandjudybookclub.co.uk>

Richard and Judy's hugely successful Book Club website, with reading notes, a message board and a chance to submit your own book reviews.

<http://www.costabookawards.com>

The Costa book awards recognise "the most enjoyable books of the last year".

<http://www.twbooks.co.uk>

Tangled Web is a comprehensive website about crime, mystery, thrillers, fantasy and sci-fi.

<http://www.asianreviewofbooks.com>

Hong Kong-based website covering all aspects of books of Asian and Chinese interest.

<http://www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk>

Great books for new readers. Plenty of subjects to choose from.

Web reading guides

Sites for Children and Young People

<http://www.cool-reads.co.uk>

Reviews of books for 10-15 year olds by 10-15 year old reviewers.

<http://www.readingzone.com>

For news and updates on your favourite authors.

<http://www.readingmatters.co.uk>

An interactive book chooser to find just the book for you; with reviews, authors and reading lists.

<http://www.groupting.org>

where young people (13 - 18) can chat, rate and review and get creative around the things they are reading, listening to, playing and watching. There are competitions, features and top tips from writers and artists. A safe, accessible site, groupthing is free to young people. Many libraries, schools and youth organisations are subscribing to the site and taking their reading groups online. For more information about groupthing go to: www.readingagency.org.uk/young/groupthing

What are libraries doing for reading groups?

What are public libraries doing for reading groups in the West Midlands? Whatever type of reader you are, and wherever you want to meet up with other readers, we can help you in a variety of ways.

Our minimum offer to reading groups includes an advice and referral service to put you in touch with existing reading groups or to help you set up your own. Your local library staff can help by providing information about reading groups and will recommend books for your group. You will also be advised about possible venues for meeting and shown online reader resources. Some libraries provide collections of books for reading groups to use.

Each local authority consults with communities to provide reading groups in response to local demand, often working with partners such as Age Concern, Youth Service, Primary Health Care Trusts, Adult Education Centres, Adult Social Services and Children's Centres.

As we are developing services, provision across the region has expanded, widening access, to support reading groups for adult learners, teenagers, children, families, visually impaired, people with mental health issues, and older people in residential homes - with reading groups adapted to their particular needs. A whole range of creative activity is already on offer to readers and reading groups, including author talks, Readers' Days, and storytelling. A further outcome of the National Year of Reading in 2008 is the Reading for Life initiative starting in 2009, of which more to come!

This pack was produced by West Midlands Public Libraries and the Reading Agency

read
readingagency.org.uk