



Lines open Mon - Fri 10am - 6pm

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Starting a Book Group

“The more that you read, the more things you’ll know,

The more that you learn the more places you’ll go.” Dr Seuss

If you love reading or you would love to read more, then a book group is for you. Hundreds of book groups are already running across Scotland. They are a great opportunity to meet other people who share your passion, have fun and they might also get you reading books that you might never have heard of otherwise.

Where to start?

If you are thinking of starting your own club why not take a look at what’s already going on in your area. You might get some useful tips or advice or you could even look at exchanging books and recommendations with already established groups. Do a search on www.bookgroup.info.

The Scottish Book Trust has set up a how-to guide for book groups. They have suggested more questions you should ask yourself before setting up a group:

Where would you like to hold your book group?

This should be a joint decision and you should consider all the members needs, for example transport links and parking.

Your Home:

The advantages of this decision are that it is easier for you, it can be quieter for a discussion and you can organise your own refreshments, which makes it cheaper.

On the other side there might not be enough room for all members, organising the refreshments can be a hassle and it is maybe not suitable if the group will be open to the public.

The Pub or a Cafe or a Tearoom

The venue should you have plenty of seats and space for you and your friends. It is easier for the group to be open to the public and the refreshments are on tap.

You’ll have to consider that it might also be noisy, you may get interrupted and meetings may not possible at busy times. Also it can be more expensive than organising the refreshments on your own.



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Will your group be open to the public or a closed group?

The Scottish Book Trust recommends you decide this at the outset, because it will affect the way the group works. You may want to open the group up to other people in your local area or in your school or college. Book website www.teenreads.com recommends between eight and twelve members. Too few could make the discussion a bit short and too many means no one gets a proper say.

You should remember the group should be welcoming and friendly and it shouldn't feel like a burden to organise. So you should think about if you feel comfortable opening your book group up to the public.

When you start a public book group, it is quite easy to spread the word about your group to those who might be interested, using social networking sites and community blogs. Be aware you should never meet up with people you don't know alone, give out your personal details online or invite a stranger to come to your home. It is important to keep in mind, that there people can come along who you might not get along with. Your part of role is to respect the views of others and to encourage other group members to do the same.

To save any stress in the long run, it's a good idea to agree a few ground rules right at the beginning. Consider some of the following:

- What is a reasonable length of time to allow between each meeting so that everyone can read the book?
- Will your group focus on a particular genre?
- Do you want people to come if they have not read the book?

The Scottish Book Trust also recommends you ask your local authority, local bookshops or your local library which different kind of services they offer for book groups.

Choosing a Book

For your first meeting you may want to plan some sort of ice-breaker. Ask everyone to bring their favourite book so that you have something to talk about and everyone can get to know each other better. The National Literacy Trust suggest discussing the books you remember most from when you were little and the effect they had on you, or bringing a book a long that made you cry or laugh out loud.

Often book groups take it in turns for each person to suggest a book for the next meeting or they may bring along a few options and then let everyone else vote for the one they want to read. If you are stuck for ideas there are loads of great resources around to help you choose the right book. The Which Book website (www.whichbook.net/index.jsp) has a list of over 20 million novels and will match your preferences to find your best read.



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For teenage book groups Cool Reads (www.cool-reads.co.uk) also has loads of good reviews written by young people themselves. Weekend newspapers will generally have a section for regular book reviews and it may also be worth keeping an eye on lists of prize-winning novels. Don't forget to check out the Young Scot e-zine (<http://www.youngscot.org/mag>) for more reviews written by young people in Scotland. The website <http://www.thereadingclub.co.uk> offers suggestions on how to choose titles for a book group as well.

Take a look at what's on the list of some of the following book awards:

- Carnegie Medal (for books aimed at young people): www.carnegiegreenaway.org.uk
- Whitbread Prize: www.themanbookerprize.com

What to discuss

www.bookgroup.info has a few suggestions for getting your conversations flowing. It might be useful for each member to make a few notes as they read the book and to bear some of these in mind.

- Your emotional response to the book.
- What do you think of the characters and how well are they written
- What are the main themes of the book
- What were the most memorable parts
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the book

Here you have some more links that may be helpful when leading a group discussion:

<http://www.book-clubs-resource.com> – A resource with a list of websites offering reading guides for individual books with possible discussion questions

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com> - An online community for reading groups, which includes information for book groups and a search engine for reading guides

<http://www.litlovers.com> A webpage offering tips for leading a book group discussion

Don't forget Scotland is also home to some world-class book festivals, not least the Edinburgh Festival, as well as more regional events, including The Borders Book Festival, The Ullapool Book Festival, Word in Aberdeen and Aye Write in Glasgow. Look at www.youngscotwow.org for an up to date list of times and programmes.

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