



Oxfordshire Libraries

Reading Groups Guide

**If you want to join, or set up and run
a reading group, this pack will guide
you to some of the resources
available.**

Joining a Reading Group

How do you find out where they are?

Oxfordshire Libraries Service runs reading groups for adults in some libraries. Your local library may have information about other reading groups in their area and will be happy to put up a poster for you, asking if there are any reading groups out there who are looking for new members. You can put a contact number on the poster or arrange with the library for a message to be left for you to collect.

As an alternative, there are a number of reading groups run by newspapers, publishers, on the Internet or on the radio. You can find more details about these and other options in the following pages.

If you would like to talk to someone you can telephone **Reading Groups** on **01865 816490** or send an **email** to **readinggroups@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Starting and running your own Reading Group

What can the Library Service do for you?

Our service is open to you - all you need is a free Oxfordshire County Council Reading Group Membership.

Join our Reading Group Service and your group will get:

- free Oxfordshire Libraries Reading Group membership to borrow up to 12 copies of a title
- list of suggested sets for reading groups
- free reservation service for sets selected for group reading
- 10 week loan period

Your local library can display a poster for you to promote your reading group and you can also promote your reading group and recruit members via the Oxfordshire County Council website. To do this, and for more general enquiries relating to reading groups, please contact **Reading Groups** on **01865 816490** or **email** **readinggroups@oxfordshire.gov.uk**

Practical advice

- **How to 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 shy 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 your first meeting**

Try to make the first meeting really relaxing and informal. You could 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? 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.
- Think about the books you would like to read in advance and choose from our list of suggested book sets.
- 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 makes you give up on a book and not finish it?

- **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!

Resources to get you started

- **The Bookseller** – the book trade's weekly magazine provides pre-publication lists and reviews. Copies are available in some libraries. www.thebookseller.com
- **newbooks** - this is a magazine specifically for readers and reading groups, containing reviews, recommendations and interviews with authors talking about books and reading. It's published 6 times a year.

The publishers of **newbooks** are happy to send any new reading group a free introductory copy of their magazine.

Please contact Guy Pringle via the website (www.newbooksmag.com) or by post:

4 Froxfield Close
Winchester
SO22 6JW
Telephone: 01962 620320

- **BooksQuarterly** – Waterstone's books magazine, published four times a year and with author interviews, articles and book reviews
- **Bloomsbury Essential Guide for Reading Groups** by Susan Osborne (2008)
Advice on getting started and a lot of book information, including readers' guides and thematic lists.

Copies available in some libraries. Please check the catalogue for locations.

Reading Guides

Some publishers and organisations produce reading guides to specific books.

Reading guides can provide starting points for your discussion by posing questions about the characters, plot, etc. They may also have background information about the author and suggested further reading. However some reading groups may find these guides too restrictive and make you feel as if you are back at school!

If you are interested in reading guides try the following:

- **Reading Group Guides** - a good starting point if you're looking for the guide to a particular book: this site allows you to browse by genre as well as author and title.
www.readinggroupguides.com
- **BookBrowse** – a general resource for book clubs, including an extensive reading guides section.
www.bookbrowse.com/reading_guides
- **Publishers' Book Guides** – publishers have long been offering reading guides to accompany their books.
- **Harper Collins** – a website dedicated to book clubs, with a list of reading guides which includes best-sellers and popular classics.
www.harpercollins.com/readers
- **Transworld** – includes a mix of new books and classics.
www.booksattransworld.co.uk/feet/readingguides.htm
- **Random House** – includes new guides each month and competitions.
www.randomhouse.co.uk/readersgroup/readingguides.htm
- **Vantage** - includes a description of each book, questions, discussion topics, and author biographies.
www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/rgg
- **Virago** - all guides contain extracts from the book, discussion questions and background material about the author.
www.virago.co.uk/reading_guides.asp

Websites

Websites devoted to books and reading are many and varied. Some have their own reading groups or give advice on how to set up a group. Some will have information packs that you can download or send for by post. Others focus more on helping you to find a good read and may be focused on a particular genre.

Here are just a few examples to whet your reading appetite.

- **General Websites about books and reading groups:**
 - **BBC Radio 4 Book Club**
www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts/bookclub
 - **Bookarmy** - what to read next based on real people's recommendations.
www.bookarmy.com
 - **Bookgroup** - readers and reviewers who are all members of book groups.
www.bookgroup.info
 - **BookTrust** - The organisation for creative reading.
www.booktrust.org.uk
 - **BookCrossing** - read a book then set it free...
www.bookcrossing.com
 - **Guardian Unlimited** - book pages.
www.booksunlimited.co.uk
 - **The Mail on Sunday 'You'** - magazine reading group
www.you-reading-group.co.uk
 - **People's Network – Read** - online service from public libraries
www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/read
 - **Penguin** - publisher site with links to readers' group
<http://readers.penguin.co.uk>
 - **The Reading Club** – advise on starting and running your own book club.
www.thereadingclub.co.uk

- **Reader's Place** – online book club community.
<http://www.readersplace.co.uk/>
- **Richard and Judy Book Club** – UKTV book discussion programme.
www.richardandjudybookclub.co.uk

- **Fiction and Poetry**

- **Black Literature** - books by, for and about Black people.
www.blackliterature.com
- **Fantastic Fiction** - sci-fi, fantasy and horror.
www.fantasticfiction.co.uk
- **Poetry Library** - promotes the reading of poetry.
www.poetrylibrary.org.uk
- **The Poetry Society** - promotes the study, use and enjoyment of poetry.
www.poetrysociety.org.uk
- **Tangled Wed** - crime, mystery, sci-fi, fantasy and horror.
www.twbooks.co.uk
- **Which Book** - find a book to match your mood.
www.whichbook.net

- **Literary Prizes**

Books that have won, or been short listed for a prize can be a good starting point for choosing titles to read in your group.

- **The Man Booker Prize** - promotes the finest in fiction by rewarding the best book of the year.
www.themanbookerprize.com
- **The Guardian First Book Award** - the Guardian first book award is open to debut works across all genres (formerly the Guardian Fiction Prize).
www.guardian.co.uk/books/guardianfirstbookaward
- **Orange Prize for Fiction** - rewarding the best fiction written in English, by women, throughout the world.
www.orangeprize.co.uk

- **Costa Book Awards** - has five winning categories: first novel, novel, biography, poetry and children's book (formally Whitbread Literary Awards and Whitbread Book Awards).
www.costabookawards.com

You can find a list of all the major national and international literature book awards at www.literaryawards.co.uk

Online Booksellers

Online Bookseller websites highlight bestsellers, new and future releases and have special offers on a wide variety of titles. You can search by category of book or for a specific title.

There is usually a publisher's synopsis for each book and a selection of reviews from a variety of newspapers/magazines. Anyone using the web site can add their own reviews of particular titles. These reader to reader comments can be helpful when deciding what might make an interesting book for a group to read.

Here is a small selection, but there are many more.

- **Amazon**
www.amazon.co.uk
- **Borders**
www.borders.co.uk
- **Waterstones**
www.waterstones.co.uk
- **W H Smith**
www.whsmith.co.uk

If you would like any further information please contact **Reading Groups** on **01865 816490** or email readinggroups@oxfordshire.gov.uk

December 2012