



CYNGOR LLYFRAU CYMRU
WELSH BOOKS COUNCIL



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Rhannu'r Wefr Sharing the buzz

Canllawiau ar gyfer
grwpiau darllen

Guidelines for
reading groups



Estyn Allan

Noddir gan
Lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Sponsored by
Welsh Assembly Government



Introduction

'The reading group has changed my life. It opened doors that I never knew were there. I've met so many different people to share all my reading thrills and spills. Talking books is amazing. Never before have I had the opportunity to have such lovely books in my hands – and all free – and to be truthful about them regardless of cost!

We have hilarious evenings packed with natter and chatter, friendly disagreements and some shocks. I find that I read books I would never ever have noticed or cared to notice. In fact I love the monthly evenings so much I belong to two groups and don't even realise how many books I've read until I count up at the end of the year.'

Julia, Llangernyw

THESE GUIDELINES ARE INTENDED to help you get started. They're for anyone who'd like to start a reading group for adults, or who wants to develop an existing group. They're suitable for groups in libraries, private groups or groups in shops, workplaces or clubs. The ideas and suggestions come from various sources – personal experience, specialist training with Estyn Allan, searching the internet and books, and some original ideas.

You can use the guidelines as you wish – by browsing through or going straight to specific sections. If you plan to use the resources, you will need to make photocopies and cut them up before hand (laminates them first if you're likely to use them more than once).

Enjoy the reading and the chatting!

Bethan M. Hughes

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1 What is a reading group?

Quite simply, a reading group is a group of readers getting together regularly to discuss books and to share the experience and the buzz of reading.

A reading group is not an adult education class or a literary circle. It's a chance for readers to get together to share the reading experience. What's important is the quality of each individual reader's experience of reading a book, their feelings as they were reading and their response to it – not the quality of the book itself. You don't need literary skills, a degree in literature or experience as a reviewer to be a member. Enjoying reading and chatting about books is the only 'qualification' required.

A reader-centred reading group:

- respects everybody's individual reading experience
- enables people with different reading preferences to talk to each other on common ground
- encourages honest exploration of responses instead of a pressure to perform
- accommodates varying levels of time commitment and reading appetite

(from www.openingthebook.com)

The names of groups vary – reading circles, book clubs or readers' groups – and for these guidelines the name 'reading group' includes all these variations.

Some groups focus on novels and fiction, others on poetry or non-fiction; some stick to one fiction *genre* – crime fiction or romance, for example. Most groups, however, read a wide variety of books.

The group itself decides what sort of group it wants to be, when and where it will meet and what the members will be reading.

2 Why join a reading group?

Reading is an individual creative activity, internal and private, and a reading group offers you the opportunity to meet other readers to share the reading experience and your response to a book.

“Reading is such a personal thing, and I need to talk to someone about it – no-one in my family is interested. I need to express the strong emotions a book arouses.”

Reading is also a unique experience. It’s a relationship between a reader and a book and, through the book, between a reader and an author. The reading experience is unique to that moment in time, in a particular place, at a particular time in the reader’s life. The reader responds to the book through the context of his or her own life experiences, and that’s why two people’s experiences with the same book can be so different. In a reading group, there’s a chance to share and compare these experiences.

Reading groups can also widen your reading horizon, encourage you to read different books or challenge you to tackle a book you wouldn’t normally touch with a barge pole.

“The group has made me read Welsh books – and I’m so grateful because I enjoy them so much.”

“I’ve read books which I would never have read without the group – and thank goodness for that.”

A reading group also offers a social occasion and an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds via books.

“I joined the group to meet like-minded people and to widen my reading experience.”

“We’re such a varied group of people, yet reading brings us together regularly.”

For many readers, a group offers a discipline for their reading and a reason to find personal time in the middle of a hectic life.

“It’s a good discipline – I have to make the time to read during the month.”

“I really need this time for me – for too long I’ve given my time to my young family. I really enjoy the whole thing – new books, new people.”

and it can lead to other things in the world of books:

“Through the reading group I’ve had a chance to meet authors and to chat with them about their books – wonderful!”

For libraries, reading groups are a chance to offer an enrichment to the reading experience. They can show the library in a whole new light to many readers and they can attract new customers. Reading groups can also help libraries to promote reading to a wider community.

“Coming to the Bookstart rhyme times in the library with my children got me back in to the library – and I discovered that libraries are so different to how they used to be. They’re not silent, scary places – but friendly and homely. So I went ahead and joined the reading group – and I really enjoy this break from being a mum!”

“The books I read in the group go much further. My grown-up son and daughter ask me about the books I’m reading and they often read them too – then they tell their friends about them.”

3 Starting a new group

Why do you want to start a reading group?

You've been thinking for a while that you'd like to start a group. Perhaps you're a keen reader yourself and would like to meet other readers to talk about books and reading. Perhaps you're part of a crowd of friends or colleagues who want to spend regular time together to talk about books. Or perhaps you're a librarian who wants to offer an opportunity for readers in your library to get together to widen the reading experience.

What sort of group will it be?

Library group

- It's a neutral and safe venue open to everyone and it welcomes readers
- Using a room or part of the library will probably be free of charge
- There are resources to hand (books, computers, catalogue)
- The group can use the expertise of library staff
- It makes reading visible to other people
- You may need to consider out-of-hours access
- Be aware of the pressure on staff time

Private/friends group

- The group usually meets in each other's homes
- The atmosphere will be quite informal, especially if everyone already knows each other
- It's harder for new people to join a private group
- Be aware of personal safety if you go to strangers' homes

Group in a community venue

- Some groups meet in pubs, cafes or community centres
- The atmosphere is informal and it's fairly easy for new members to join
- You'll need to take the books to the venue

Online group

- A group which discusses reading via a website or e-mail

- An opportunity to communicate with readers all over the world
- Ideal for people who cannot attend meetings or who want to respond to books in a less public way
- Many reading group members are also members of online groups

What will the group read?

- Fiction, non-fiction, biographies, poetry – or a variety?
- In which language will you read and discuss? It is possible, for example, to discuss Welsh and English books through the medium of Welsh. What about other languages, or people learning a language?

Who will the members be?

- Will the group be open to anyone to join? Library groups are usually open by definition.
- Will you invite people to join, as private groups usually do?
- Will the group include people with a visual impairment? Will everyone use the same format (audio books on CD/cassette or large print) or will you provide according to individuals' needs?

How large will the group be?

- To be manageable, most groups have between 6 and 15 members

Be prepared to start in a small way – 3 or 4 people will be enough to get going and you'll soon attract more members; the original members will probably bring a friend with them next time.

The members of the most successful reading groups are often a mix of ages, backgrounds and interests.

4 Examples of reading groups

Every single reading group is different and has its own dynamic. What they all have in common is that readers get together to talk about books and the reading experience.

Cwmbrân Library Reading Group

Library staff were keen to start a reading group to bring readers together. The group was advertised with posters, items in the local press and by word of mouth, targeting library members and the wider community. Within a few weeks there were enough names to form two groups, which now meet every month on a Saturday. The books which lead to the hottest debates are those the members don't like! The library displays the group's reader comments alongside copies of the books.

Friends' book group

This group doesn't have a name because they were already friends who wanted to get together to talk about books. Many of them were keen to widen their reading and to get hold of different books. They meet every six weeks in a member's home (in turn) and she chooses the books for that meeting. They have a snack to eat, a bit of social chat, then they get on with discussing the books. They often have quite a heated debate – one member is particularly good at asking provoking questions.

Teenage Reading Group, Cefn Mawr Library, Wrexham

They call themselves the Adventure Group – because they think every book is an adventure. The group meets every month to discuss books they've chosen (and to enjoy a drink and chocolate!). The members write comments about the books on the library's computers, display them in the teenagers' library area and they send them to the local newspaper. When the group have enjoyed a book, they put a recommended sticker on the library's copy; and they use the internet to search for books to read. Authors have visited the group and they've been on outings to places like the BBC studios in Wrexham. For their Christmas party, each member brought a mate so as to introduce them to the library or the group, and they plan to welcome other groups of young people in to show them what goes on.

Other teenage reading group meet for just a short period – about 6 weeks – so that the young people

know what they're committing themselves to, without having to plan too far ahead.

'Grown-ups' in Denbighshire

Whilst running story and rhyme times for toddlers in community centres, the Bookstart worker heard the young parents talking about a book. She saw the opportunity and offered to bring them books to look at in the next session. She took a boxful of adult books from the library – high profile novels and biographies. The parents had never been to the library and they didn't know the library had such books. They were delighted by the choice of books and couldn't wait to borrow them to read. In the following story times, they would discuss the books during the coffee break. The worker started jotting down their comments about the books, and these are now displayed in the libraries for other readers to see. By now, the parents are much more confident about their reading, are library members, and borrow and read regularly. They're thinking of meeting as a reading group soon – without the children being there!

Gwaenysgor Reading Group and the Mobile Library

In a rural part of Flintshire, a group of readers meet every 3 months to discuss books. One member had seen that there were reading groups in libraries in the area, but it wasn't practical for her and her friends to travel to them. With the library service's support, a group was formed and it meets at her house. The group chooses and orders sets of books from the library's lists, and they collect them from the mobile library when it visits their village.

Welsh Learners' Reading Group at Ruthin Library

Every month a group of adults who have learnt Welsh get together to talk in Welsh about Welsh books, with the support of a librarian. At first, they were happy to read short novels written for learners, but they soon started asking for more challenging and satisfying reads. They now read and discuss a wide variety of contemporary and classic fiction, biographies and poetry. They are delighted to be able to use their Welsh language skills outside their lessons and to learn about the wealth of Welsh books available. Several members make a note of words and expressions that are new to them – and they've learnt a whole new vocabulary by reading certain novels!

5 Attracting members and advertising

Word of mouth

- This is usually the most effective way – readers mentioning it to friends and neighbours, library staff telling borrowers

Target

- If the group is for a specific community of people, it's worth targeting, for example, schools to attract young parents, sports clubs or pubs to attract men
- Remember the needs of people with a visual impairment by designing publicity in an appropriate format. Use media such as local societies, talking newspapers and websites to reach them. There are several websites offering useful guidance – go to *Reading groups and books on the web* [Section 16]

Posters and flyers

- Put up posters in libraries, bookshops and community venues
- Put a flyer in every book borrowed from the library or sold in a shop over a period of time

Press and media

- Write a brief press release for the local papers or offer an interview to local radio

When you create posters, flyers or text for a website to attract readers to join a reading group, sell the benefit to the readers rather than the group itself:

- Emphasise the thrill of reading and sharing rather than being a member of a group
- Sell the pleasure and enjoyment, the socialising with other readers, the excitement of reading new books
- Remember that most people won't know what a reading group is
- Use suggestive, humorous language to show that the aim is to have fun and to show the difference between a reading group and a literature class
- How about using a slick metaphor to describe the reading experience?

A love affair with a book – new relationship,
old flame, blind date
Journey with a book – searching for

somewhere, map, arrival, unexpected destination, getting lost, coming home
A taste for reading – new taste, comforting food, exotic tastes, sweet/bitter, chewing it over, devouring books

Here's one example of promoting reading groups on a website:

What is it like to be absolutely still for hours while a master paints you? What would a Dickensian novel be like, if it were written today?

Groups of people who like reading, and who want to talk about what they are reading, have been gathering together in libraries and discussing books. Each month they have been given the same book, and gone off to their favourite chair, sofa, bath or whatever and read it, only to return next month to tell each other how great, good, alright or rubbish they felt it to be. Yes, that's right, it's not compulsory to like these books. In fact, the discussions are far more lively and interesting when opinions differ.

From October we'll be finding out how a boy with Asperger's Syndrome investigates a crime. We'll see how a happily married couple can live in adjacent flats. We'll meet witches and armoured bears. We'll spend time in a Bengal community in London and we'll find out what sort of cook a Minotaur is. All this in the comfort of a friendly library with free tea and biscuits. What could be better?

Come along, you may find a book you really love, or even one you hate enough to get quite excited about. Give it a try, you know you want to!

(from www.bridgend.gov.uk)

6 The first meeting

This first meeting will set the foundation for the future and will leave an impression on the readers, so it's important to strike the right note from the start. Even if you already know each other, this is a chance to get to know each other *as readers*.

Start with a game

Play the *Dear Reader* game [Section 12 & 18] in pairs and ask each member to introduce their partner by giving their name and sharing one interesting fact about them as a reader (using the information shared in the game).

Explain what a reading group is

Find out what people's expectations are of the group and what they hope to get out of it – be considerate if people are nervous. Explain what a reading group is and that it isn't an academic literature class. Keep the emphasis on the fun and pleasure of reading and on sharing the reading experience, rather than the mechanics of running the group.

Start to discuss

- ◆ What sorts of books will the group want to read?
- ◆ Will you borrow library copies or buy the books?
- ◆ Will you need accessible formats (large print, audio CD/cassette)?
- ◆ Will you all read the same book or follow themes?
Go to *Choosing what to read* [Section 8]
- ◆ What sort of discussion will you be having?
Go to *Discussing books* [Section 10]
- ◆ It's a good idea to vary the pattern from time to time
Go to *Games* [Section 12] or *Special activities* [Section 11]
- ◆ Where will the group meet? In the library, in homes, in a pub or café, or a community centre?
- ◆ Will you need to hire a room and pay for it? How will you cover any costs?
- ◆ How often? Most groups meet once a month, which gives enough time for members to read one or two books. Some groups meet every week and discuss the book as they're reading. Others

only get together once every two months or once a term.

- ◆ What time? Daytime, evening, weekends?
- ◆ For how long? About an hour and a half to two hours should give enough time for social chat, discussing the books, sorting any business, refreshments and clearing up.
- ◆ Will you be having refreshments? What type? Wine or coffee? Food?
- ◆ Who will provide and prepare it? If there are costs, how do you cover them? Who clears up?
- ◆ Will someone lead the group?
- ◆ Who will lead the meetings and steer the discussion?

Go to *Leading a reading group* [Section 7] for more guidance

It's useful for the leader to have a list of the members' names, phone numbers and addresses in case you need to contact someone before the next meeting. Get everyone's permission before sharing the list with the whole group or with anyone else.

The next few meetings

You don't need to decide on everything at the first meeting – try out a few different ways of discussing and choosing books and a pattern will emerge. It would be a good idea to review your arrangements after about 6 months to see if everyone is satisfied with them.

7 | Leading a reading group

Every reading group needs an element of co-ordination and leadership to ensure successful meetings and effective arrangements. In many groups, the same person co-ordinates the group and leads or facilitates the discussions; in others, different people take on these roles.

Co-ordinating

Often, the person who instigated setting up the group acts as its co-ordinator – a keen reader, a librarian or member of library or bookshop staff, for example. The role can include:

- Facilitating the discussion in the first meetings
- Looking after new members
- Arranging the meeting room
- Ensuring the books are chosen in good time
- Suggesting special activities or games
- Getting hold of the books the group will read
- Overseeing the group's publicity
- Collecting readers' comments

Facilitating

Each member in turn could facilitate, steer or chair the discussion – it shares the responsibility and encourages everyone to contribute to the group's activity. The facilitator may:

- Call the meeting to order after the necessary social chat at the start
- Ask the first question to get the discussion going (consider a suitable opening question beforehand)
- Ask open questions to encourage discussion rather than one word answers!
- Ensure everyone gets a chance to speak if they wish
- Bring the discussion back to the book if you go off on a tangent
- Throw in questions to change the direction of the discussion
- Keep things on an even keel if there's a disagreement
- Remind the group of its rules if things go awry

In these guidelines, the word 'leader' has been used to cover all these roles.

For ideas on what sort of discussion to have – *Discussing books* [Section 10]

For general questions suitable for most books – *Chatting about books* [Section 12 & 21]

For ways to tackle problems – *Troubleshooting* [Section 14]

Encourage people to come to the meeting even if they haven't finished reading the book. They'll enjoy the chat and can ask questions, and it may help someone who's struggling with a book. Decide as a group if you want to discuss how a book ends in front of people who haven't yet finished it!

As the leader, don't be too strict about keeping the discussion to the book – the reading experience is very personal and can help people understand aspects of their own lives which they may want time to talk through. However, don't spend too much time on tangents, and remember about all the other members' needs too.

The leader does not have to have read the book every time! It can be useful to have a chairperson who is unbiased about the book and can hold the reins and steer the discussion rather than expressing an opinion. Use the general questions in *Chatting about books* [Section 12 & 21].

As leader, you are not the resident expert; you are not expected to know everything about the books. Everyone's opinion is important – your role is to enable others to share their experiences.

Don't take on the burden of doing everything – choosing the books, organising the room, making the coffee, leading the discussion, recording comments and creating publicity posters! Use the game *To each a role* [Section 12 & 20] to share out the jobs between all the members.

8 Choosing what to read

When setting up the group, you will have decided whether you want to be a group which reads a wide variety of books, or if you want to be more focussed. Many very successful reading groups focus on one type of book or *genre* (crime fiction, poetry, romance or fantasy for example), but the majority read a variety of books.

How far ahead will you choose the books? You need to allow enough time to get hold of the books but not plan so far ahead that you can't respond to a new idea or a change of mood amongst the members – keep it flexible. Between 2 and 6 months is the usual pattern.

When you've chosen your books or themes, produce a flyer with the dates for each discussion. Everyone will then know what to read and when the meetings are. You can also send the flyer to absent members. Library groups usually put a poster up on a library noticeboard to show what they're reading – it can attract new members and offer reading suggestions for other library users.

If any members have special needs, especially a visual impairment, try and choose books which are also available in accessible formats – audio books on cassette or CD, large print, braille etc. The local library should be able to provide large print or audio copies if they're published, or individuals can borrow from the RNIB or the National Library for the Blind (see *Reading groups and books on the internet* [Section 16] for contact details). When you plan your programme, take into consideration the time it might take to get hold of these alternative format copies.

The same book

The group chooses one book for everyone to read and to then discuss at the next meeting. Even though everyone is reading the same book, each reader's reading experience will be different, of course, and that's what makes for a good discussion. You will often have a better discussion when people disagree about a book, or even when everyone disliked it!

Sometimes, if there are not enough copies available, or in order to have a different sort of discussion, the group might want to choose two books. It's a good idea to have some link between the two books to help the discussion. There may be a connection or a contrast between the two books or the two authors. They may deal with the same theme in different ways.

There are many ways of finding books to decide what to read:

- Suggestions by group members
- Suggestions by a librarian or bookseller
- Games e.g. *Meet the books*, *Aperitifs* [Section 12]
- Special promotions e.g. the Welsh Books Council's Wales Book of the Month and Nofel y Mis
- Displays in a library or shop
- 'Hot' books that everyone's talking about
- Items in magazines or newspapers
- Readers' comments on a library display
- Radio and TV
- Winners and shortlists/longlists of book awards
- Booklists
- Reader websites
- Publishers' publicity
- www.gwales.com recommended reads

When readers have enjoyed a book, they may want to read more of the same sort of book or other books by the same writer. Many websites offer further reading ideas [Section 16] and books like *Who else writes like?* and *Adult sequels* are available in libraries – *Books about books* [Section 17].

A variety of books

Although reading the same book means that every member can share a common experience, sometimes it's a good idea to vary the pattern and discuss a wider range of books. It can encourage you to read different books to your usual diet, and it gives everyone a chance to contribute to the discussion, even if they haven't read the same book as someone else.

With many of the following suggestions, it would be very useful to have a collection of books from the library to help members choose books. Perhaps some of the members could help the library to put the collections together.

Themes

Each reader chooses their own books within the theme and at the next meeting they show it and describe it briefly to the group. Hearing a short reading can give others a flavour of the book.

- One author's books
- First novels by new writers
- Award winners
- Books from small independent presses
- Favourite books from childhood
- Books from the same decade
- Books from the same country or continent
- Books that have helped me through something
- Books I never finished
- Translated books
- Contemporary books written as 'sequels' to classics
- Books which opened my eyes
- Poetry by writers who are also novelists
- Books I've been meaning to read but haven't got around to
- Pet hate books
- Books which gave a different experience on re-reading them
- Books I'd like help with

Seasonal

You could read:

- Love stories for Valentine's Day
- Welsh books in translation or Welsh Writing in English for St David's Day
- Christmas stories
- Books to avoid Christmas
- Books for the beach or a long journey
- Ghost stories for Halloween
- War stories or poetry for Remembrance Sunday
- Books to note celebrations or anniversaries (e.g. Olympic Games, authors' centenaries)
- Book of the Year Long List

Genres

Travel writing, biographies, poetry, crime fiction, humour, fantasy, science fiction, sagas, historical fiction, short stories – the choice is very wide. You could

- read two or three books from one *genre* which are very different in their content or style
- leave each member to choose their own book within the genre (have books to hand to help them choose)
- follow one *genre* over a series of meetings

9 Help as you read

Remember that it's the quality of the reading experience that matters and not the quality of the book. It's your response to the book as you read it and when you've finished it that you'll be discussing. Have a go at some of these techniques as you read – they may enrich the experience and help you remember things to discuss with the group.

Think for a minute

After each reading session, spend a minute or two thinking over what you've read and whether there was anything which pleased, confused or worried you.

Memory aids

Use sticky note slips to mark places that interest you. Make a list of the main characters and write a few words about their main motivations (a great help with novels with a lot of characters).

Bookmarking

This is one way of recording your relationship with a book as you read it, so that you can compare your reading experience with the experiences of others. By the time you get to the end of a book, it's easy to forget how you felt half way through

Make copies of the set of bookmarks [Section 23] for each reader. As you read the book, place the bookmarks in the appropriate places and write a few comments on them. Leave them in their places in the book. Bring the book with its bookmarks to the next meeting. Compare where everyone placed them and the comments you each made. You could do this as a whole group or in pairs or small groups.

Reading diary

Keep a diary or notebook at your side as you read. Write in the title and author of the book and the dates you start and finish reading it. How about noting down what your expectations are of the book before starting to read, or the reason why you chose it?

As you read, and at the end of each chapter or section, write down three words or phrases to help you remember your reaction at the time to the plot, characters and writing. Do this quickly without thinking too much about it. Then at the end of the book, write three words or phrases about your reaction to the book as a whole. Note down too whether the book has reached your expectations or not. Would you recommend it to another reader? Be honest and instinctive in your reading diary – you won't be showing it to anyone else.

Bring the diary with you to the reading group meetings to help you remember things to discuss. You will get a lot of pleasure looking back at what you read months or years ago – it would be interesting to know which books you've totally forgotten and which have stayed with you or changed your attitude towards life.

Reading aloud

If the language or writing style of a book strikes you, or is unfamiliar to you, try reading parts aloud to yourself. You will read more carefully and will hear the shape and sound of the writing. Don't worry about who can hear you – you might tempt them to want to read the book too!

10 | Discussing books

What sort of discussion are you going to have?

General discussion

Most reading groups have general discussions about the books – using general questions to start the discussion and then going into more depth about specific aspects of the book and the reading experience. You can also ask one member to start the discussion by briefly introducing the book (but without trying to summarise the whole book!) and then asking the opening question.

Some general questions can start a discussion about any book – look at *Chatting about books* [Section 21] for suggestions. The leader can use the list to start the discussion and to throw in the occasional question to change the direction of the chat or to fill a silent gap. For variety you could also use the questions on cards – shuffle them and share them out. Each member in turn reads out their question and the group starts discussing.

You could also ask everyone to write down one specific question about the book on a piece of paper, put them in a hat, and draw them out one by one to discuss.

Naturally, the talk will occasionally go off on a tangent. Whilst there's nothing wrong in that, try not to spend too much time 'away' before coming back to focus on the book itself. This is the leader's responsibility, but often one of the members will pull the discussion back on course.

Using Reading Guides

Some groups use reading guides to structure their discussions. Guides are very popular in the States and there are hundreds available on the internet or published by English publishers.

Whilst they can be useful, there is a danger that they may take some of the pleasure out of the reading experience if the reader is worrying about answering questions like an exam. It can lead to a more formal discussion – be careful that the reading group doesn't turn into a literature class. Having said that, the guides that are available are full of useful information about the books and the authors, and it might be useful for the leader to have one to hand for cribbing the odd question.

Look at *Reading groups and books on the internet* [Section 16] for websites featuring reading guides.

Background information on the book and the author

It can sometimes be useful to have some background information about the author, the book or its context. How about preparing a page of pre-reading information, and then more detailed information after reading?

The leader or another member could prepare the introductory sheet by browsing the internet and copying and pasting. Another member could then do more detailed research on the internet, in newspapers and magazines or reference books. Some groups collect all this information in a file for the use of other library readers. It's also fun to look back at the end of the year at the books you've discussed.

Don't let all this become a burden on the group or individuals. It's an add-on – the important thing is to read and discuss the book itself. Be careful too that you don't reveal plot details or the ending!

11 | Special activities

Doing a special activity now and then helps to keep the group fresh and lively.

Shadowing book awards

When an award longlist or shortlist is announced, such as the Book of the Year Award, share out the titles amongst the group, making sure that each book is read by at least one member. Get together to discuss your reading experiences and vote to see which one would win if you were the judges. Compare your result with the real one. Go to *Reading groups and books on the internet* [Section 16] for the websites of the major awards. You can register to receive e-mail updates from many of them.

Christmas or year-end meeting

Over some suitable refreshments (mulled wine and mince pies?) look back over the books the group has read over the last year (get a set of copies together before hand to remind everyone of them). Each member can champion their favourite book of the year or campaign against one they didn't like. You could then vote for the

- Cracker of the Year
- Turkey of the Year
- Surprise of the Year

and so on, using voting slips which include space for a reader comment. It's a good chance to remember books you enjoyed, even if you hated the last 3 books. Has your opinion changed on any books after a few months? Are some books still vivid in your memory and are there some you'd completely forgotten about? How about writing a press release for the new year and setting up a display of the books and comments in the library? Send responses to individual titles to www.gwales.com.

Following lists or recommendations

Several television and radio shows and newspapers are now promoting books and encouraging people to read. You could choose one of these lists – everyone reading the same book or sharing the list out amongst the group.

Library promotion

The local library may have a special book promotion – try reading some of the books, noting your comments and creating posters or comment cards to go alongside the display. It will be of great interest to other readers in the library.

First chapters

Ask each member of the group to choose their favourite 'first chapter' and share it with the group – read some aloud and chat about why they like them. You could then discuss whether there's a formula for a successful first chapter.

A taste of wine and books

A wine-tasting and book-tasting evening in one. Choose three or four books and decide what sort of reading experience they offer (short, sweet, dense, complex, light etc.). In the wine shop, look for wines which offer the same type of experience. On the night, describe the wine (use the label to help you, or ask an expert to help – is there a wine buff in the group?) then use the same words and phrases to describe the reading experience of each book. Then pour the wine and read a bit of the book aloud. Why not go the whole hog and include chocolate? Again look for chocs that offer the same experience as the books and the wine. This is a fun event and a good way of attracting new members for the group or the library. You'll need to consider the costs of buying the wine/chocolate.

Books and food or wine from a specific country
Decide on a country or continent, choose one or two books set there, and bring food/drink associated with the same place. This would also work with books in translation.

Perhaps you could get sponsorship for these types of event – a local wine shop, food shop or restaurant possibly.

Go for a meal

If you go to an Italian restaurant, for example, read books about or set in Italy and discuss them over the food. Ask members to wrap a book as a gift, place the books in a bag, and allow members to pick their mystery parcel.

Historical period

Choose a century or specific period and read books set in that time (historical fiction) or books written then (possibly in modern retellings). If you feel inclined, you could get into costume too!

Meet an author

Go and listen to an author speak at an event or festival, or invite an author to visit the group itself. You should all try and read at least one of the author's books before meeting them so that you can talk about the experience of reading. Most authors enjoy hearing about readers' experiences.

(It's usual to offer writers a fee for visiting – you must discuss this with them as you make the arrangements. In Wales, Academi's Writers on Tour scheme offers financial support www.academi.org.uk)

Theatre or cinema

Why not go and see a book on stage or on film? You could then discuss how the experience of watching it compared with reading it.

Literary festivals

Visiting a festival, such as the Hay Festival, or the Eisteddfod is a shot in the arm for many readers. It's an opportunity to hear familiar and unknown writers speak; to buy books; to take part in seminars or discussion sessions and to meet other readers.

Visits

Visit a place associated with an author or a specific book (a birthplace or home, museum, or story location).

Quiz

The questions could be based on the books you've read over the year, or general ones on books e.g.

- Which character lived at
- Who married
- Who said this
- Which book begins/ends with these words
- Who wrote ...
- Which book's cover is this (mask the title and author name)
- Which author's photo is this?

Twining with another group

Arrange to have a joint meeting with another reading group in the area – perhaps for an author visit, to visit a special location, or just to share a discussion on some books.

Arrange a readers' day with other groups

A day for all the reading groups in the area – discussion sessions, reading games, book exchanges, exhibitions, guest speakers, book sales etc.

Take part in projects

Increasingly, publishers and other agencies in the book world are realising that working with reading groups is a good way to reach readers and to collect their responses. Some publishers offer proof copies of books for groups to read and respond to; others offer a book of the month scheme or arrange author visits. Often, the county's reader development librarian is the link person and groups should keep in touch with them.

12 Reading games

Dear Reader

Useful for

- ❖ a group's first meeting
- ❖ when a new member joins a group
- ❖ to rejuvenate a group

Need

- ❖ *Dear Reader* cards [Section 18]

Time

- ❖ 5–10 minutes

Divide the group into pairs or threes. Everyone takes a card and asks their partner the question on it. Encourage everyone to chat about the question rather than give a one-word answer. Take more cards as needed to keep the chat going.

Chatting about books

Useful for

- ❖ sparking a discussion on any book
- ❖ the group leader (especially if they haven't read the book themselves)
- ❖ when there isn't anyone to lead
- ❖ when the discussion dries up

Need

- ❖ *Chatting about books* cards [Section 21]

The discussion leader can use them, or set them on the table, upside down, and members choose one from time to time.

Blast from the past

Useful for

- ❖ exploring memories of books you've read in the past

Need

- ❖ access to a library or bookshop and its stock
- ❖ *Blast from the past* cards [Section 19]. Make enough copies for at least one card per member.

Time

- ❖ 10 minutes to browse, 15–30 minutes (dependent on numbers)

Everyone browses in the library/shop for 10 minutes, then must come back with a book they've read in the past. Each member in turn to show their book, take a card from the pile, and answer its question.

Meet the Books

Useful for

- ❖ helping to choose books for the group to read
- ❖ encouraging the group to take a risk with unfamiliar and unusual books

Need

- ❖ collection of 10–15 books. Try and choose less familiar books, with unusual covers, unfamiliar authors etc.

Time

- ❖ 30 minutes

Set the books out on the table and concentrate on the covers and the blurb. If someone has already read one, or knows something about it, they should keep it quiet. Chat about

- ❖ which ones appeal to them? Why?
- ❖ which ones don't appeal? Why?
- ❖ at whom does the publisher market the books? How can you guess?

Quick Choice

Useful for

- ❖ chatting about how people choose books
- ❖ chatting about prejudices about books

Need

- ❖ access to a library, shop or room with a good selection of books

Time

- ❖ 30 minutes

Everyone to go to the shelves and choose 3 books – one for indulgence, one for a challenge and one you wouldn't normally touch with a bargepole. You must choose quickly as you only get 5 minutes. Come back together and talk about what you all chose and why.

Quick word

Useful for

- ❖ sharing ideas about books to read as an individual or as a group
- ❖ to try and find interesting words to describe a reading experience

Need

- ❖ paper and pens

Time

- ❖ 20 minutes

Write the author and title of a book on one side of a piece of paper, and on the other side write one word which describes the experience of reading it. Put all the papers down on the table with the author/title face down. Everyone to choose a paper and agree to give the book a try, or to put it on the group's reading programme.

Aperitifs

Useful for

- ❖ choosing books for the group to read
- ❖ encouraging the group to tackle unusual or unfamiliar books

Need

- ❖ collection of 10–15 books. Try and choose unfamiliar books, unusual covers, unfamiliar authors etc.
- ❖ Voting cards – set of 2 for each member [Section 22]

Time

- ❖ 30 minutes

Share the books randomly amongst the group. In turn, each player reads aloud the first ten lines of their book and then the first ten lines of page 40. The group votes by using the voting cards – is the book ‘Mmm’ or ‘Yuck’? Count the votes to see which books are most popular.

Pass the parcel

Useful for

- ❖ sharing book recommendations
- ❖ encouraging people to try unfamiliar things and to take a risk with their reading

Need

- ❖ each member to bring a copy of a book they’ve read in the past (keep the book a secret for now)
- ❖ strips of paper and pens

Time

- ❖ 15 minutes

Keep the book hidden for now. Everyone takes a strip of paper and writes their book’s title and author on the top of the paper. Then fold the top down so that it can’t be read (like the game Consequences). Then write and fill in “You’ll like this book if.....”
“You’ll hate this book if.....”
“This will remind you of.....”
then fold the paper up completely. All stand in a circle and pass the papers from hand to hand until the leader calls ‘Stop’. Open your paper and read the notes – but don’t look at the title/author. If you fancy reading the book, sit down. If not, refold the paper and pass it around again amongst those still standing. Keep going until everyone has chosen and sat down. Then, ask for the book on your paper and arrange to borrow it from its owner, and read it.

Brilliant Beginnings and Excellent Endings

Useful for

- ❖ varying the pattern of meetings
- ❖ looking for ideas of what to read

Beforehand, each member chooses their favourite opening for a book and a favourite ending (probably from two different books). At the meeting, members explain why they’ve chosen those pieces and then read them aloud. Limit the time to 2 minutes per reading. How about having one person’s choice at the beginning or end of each meeting for a period?

To each a role

Useful for

- ❖ for sharing out responsibilities
- ❖ if the leader is under pressure or unable to attend
- ❖ if one person starts to dominate the group

Need

- ❖ *To each a role* cards [Section 20] – the ones that are relevant to your group

The best way to use these is to set the cards in a pile and each person to draw one. You could give specific cards to specific people if there’s a problem within the group, but be sensitive to people’s feelings.

Take your partner

Useful for

- ❖ for keen readers who need a lot of books to read each month
- ❖ for scattered readers who cannot meet often if at all (e.g. if they use a mobile library or are housebound, or if they correspond by e-mail or text)

This is like an informal book chain, which is not restricted to specific books. Those members who want to be in a partnership put their names in a hat. Draw the names out in pairs. Each pair become reading partners for the month. Partners suggest books for each other to read that month. At the next group meeting, allow some time for partners to chat about their book suggestions and to select new partners. You may decide to stay with the same partner for more than one month, and to meet outside the group meetings if you wish. If you don’t meet as a group, you could send comments to each other.

13 Writing about books

One of the most successful ways of promoting reading is to get readers to tell other readers about books.

Many libraries have dedicated noticeboards where readers can put up cards with book comments and other readers can look at them. In bookshops, staff often put comments on the shelves below the books. Several websites also offer discussion forums, and it is possible to send responses to www.gwales.com

How to write about books

The aim is to encourage other readers to read the book, or to give them a flavour of your experience reading it, and not to evaluate its literary merit. Remember that you're not writing a school essay nor a literary review for a newspaper.

- ❖ Write as if you were writing to a close friend
- ❖ Keep the comments personal – how you felt as you were reading
- ❖ Keep the language light and familiar
- ❖ Don't summarise the plot
- ❖ Try to say three interesting things about the book
- ❖ Be honest
- ❖ Don't be afraid to say if you didn't like the book

If relevant

- ❖ Give advice about how to get in to the book
- ❖ Explain that the content may not be what the jacket or blurb suggests

14 Troubleshooting

New members

It isn't always easy for a new member to blend into an existing group where everyone knows each other. It isn't such a problem in small communities where people tend to know everyone – but even then they won't know each other as readers!

- ❖ Suggest they read the book(s) before coming so that they can join in the discussion if they feel confident enough – or at least know what everyone else is on about.
- ❖ Don't draw too much attention to the new member.
- ❖ Don't ask everyone to recite their name at the beginning – as leader try and use everyone's name during the discussion.
- ❖ Briefly explain the order of the meeting at the beginning.
- ❖ Try to have a word with the new member at the end of the meeting.

Very keen readers

The one or two group books per month are nowhere near enough for them. How about:

- ❖ Suggesting they read other books by the same author or on the same theme and report back to the group on how the group's book compares.
- ❖ Playing *Take your partner* [Section 12].

Isolated readers

People who can't attend meetings regularly – due to geographical problems, health, work or home circumstances. Yet they want to be part of the community of readers in the group and have a chance to communicate with other readers and get suggestions for books to read.

- ❖ Use *Take your partner* [Section 12] with a member of the group willing to be a partner for the isolated person
- ❖ Correspond by e-mail, website forum or text and send book comments to the group
- ❖ Form a group that meets in members' homes, with the mobile library delivering sets of books

Scorn or disrespect for other people's opinions

From the beginning, the group should agree on rules to ensure that everyone gets respect and fair play within the group. However, occasionally, a member may break a rule

– perhaps by making a scornful remark about another member's opinion of a book, or say something too personal about another member.

- ❖ At the time, the group leader should try and keep the situation under control by saying something like 'Let's try and keep this from getting personal' or 'We must remember that everyone has the right to their own opinion within the group and that we respect every member's opinion'.
- ❖ Spend a few minutes at the start of the meeting reviewing and re-stating the rules to remind everyone of what you've agreed and, if you need to, you can reach a solution without making personal accusations against any individual.
- ❖ If the problem persists, the leader should have a quiet word with the troublesome member and explain the problem.

Dominant member

One member tries to dominate the discussion by talking loudly or interrupting others, not letting anyone else express an opinion or contribute to the discussion. This can destroy the group atmosphere and annoy other members.

- ❖ Structure the discussion so that other members open the discussion by introducing the book.
- ❖ Suggest that this member prepare a background information sheet to share with the group during the meeting. The member will not then need to share this knowledge verbally.
- ❖ Use *To each a role* [Sections 12 & 20] to give everyone a specific role in the discussion – perhaps making sure the dominant member gets a more subdued role for once.
- ❖ The leader should keep control of the discussion, thanking this member for their comments and inviting someone else to contribute.

Discussion fizzles out

Occasionally the discussion will flag and no-one knows what to say next. This can sometimes happen when everyone agrees about the book in question.

- ❖ Try and make sure the leader has one of the *Games* [Section 12] ready to use in every meeting.

Multiple conversations

During the discussion, several mini discussions break out between two or three members, so that everyone is talking across each other. The bigger the group, the more danger there is of this happening. It can be a problem for everyone, especially anyone who is hard of hearing. The discussion will fall apart and it is disrespectful of the person who was speaking at the time.

- ❖ The leader must call for order and ask people not to talk with their neighbour when someone is speaking.
- ❖ Is the room layout suitable for the group and its size? If you're sitting round a table, is it too big? If people can't hear properly, they'll start talking to the person next to them.
- ❖ If someone in the group is hard of hearing, make sure they sit in the middle of the group and not on the fringes.
- ❖ Encourage people not to sit in the same seat every time or next to the same people – move people around so that they have new neighbours.
- ❖ Spend a minute or two at the start reviewing the group's rules to remind everyone of what you agreed.

Shy member

It is not compulsory to speak within the group – some members may enjoy coming to listen to other people's experiences without contributing themselves. However, the leader should ensure that they really don't want to speak. They may want to say something but feel too shy, intimidated, or can't get a word in edgeways.

- ❖ The leader could have a chat with them beforehand about the book under discussion to see what their reading experience was. The leader could then raise an issue or make a relevant point based on what they said to bring the shy member into the discussion.
- ❖ Structure the discussions so that every member in turn opens the discussion by introducing the books – go to *Leading a reading group* [Section 7] and *Discussing*

books [Section 10]. This gives everyone an equal chance to contribute.

- ❖ Use *To each a role* [Section 12 & 20] to give everyone a role in the discussion – perhaps ensuring an appropriate role for this member.
- ❖ Would this member prefer to contribute to the group's activity in another, less public, way? You could ask them to note down some of the comments from the discussion to put up on a readers' noticeboard in the library, in a newsletter or website. Or they may like to be responsible for collecting and sharing out the new books at the end of the meeting.
- ❖ Play one of the *Games* [Section 12] or hold one of the *Special activities* [Section 11] to vary the pattern of the meetings occasionally and reduce the pressure of needing to speak in front of everyone.

Disagreement over what to read next

Try and make choosing the books as democratic as possible by giving everyone a chance to be part of the process. One of the reasons for being part of a reading group is to read books you would not normally have chosen or come across. Members should, therefore, be prepared to have a go with any book members suggest.

- ❖ Don't set your reading programme too far in advance. You need enough time to get hold of the book but not too long or the group won't be able to respond to new ideas or a change of mood amongst the members. Keep it flexible.
- ❖ Ensure enough variety in your programme so that there's something for everyone.
- ❖ Look at *Choosing what to read* [Section 8].
- ❖ If a member insists that they only want to read certain types of books, you should consider if a new specialist group is needed (e.g. crime fiction, literary fiction, poetry or romance).

15 Suggestions for librarians

Managing sets of books

Many library services offer multiple copy sets of books for reading groups. They vary from 6 to 12 copies. The sets need to be managed to avoid two groups needing the same set at the same time.

- ◆ It's easier if the sets are all stored together in one place with a named person responsible for them.
- ◆ Create a calendar or database to record which group wants which sets. With monthly meetings, each set will spend 8–10 weeks with one group – time to deliver them to the group, a month to read, then up to a month for all the books to be returned before it can be sent on to the next group.

Keeping track of the books

This is one method that works in libraries with a computerised stock management system.

- ◆ Create a membership category for reading groups. If possible, set a longer default loan period to match the frequency of the groups' meetings (usually one month)
- ◆ Give each reading group a membership card with the leader as the contact person
- ◆ Place requests for books against this card
- ◆ When the books arrive, issue them to this card
- ◆ Keep the books to hand to give to reading group members who call in to borrow them before the next meeting

You can leave the books on the group's card, but you will not know which individual has which copies. If you want to know this:

- ◆ Issue the individual books on each member's personal ticket, allowing the appropriate loan period
- ◆ If the library is closed when the group meets, make a note of the membership number and the book's barcode for entering on the system the following day
- ◆ When a member returns a book, it goes back on the shelf or to its home library

Bringing groups together

In many areas, the library service arranges an annual meeting of representatives of all the reading groups in its catchment area. The groups enjoy the opportunity to compare how the groups are organised, build a relationship between groups, share ideas, and encourage support for events.

Staff support

Try and ensure that all the library's staff are aware of what the group is reading each month so as to support

the readers and increase their own book knowledge. It's also a good idea for each member of staff in turn to attend a group meeting to see what goes on, even if supporting the group is not one of their responsibilities.

Noticeboard

How about having a dedicated noticeboard and table/shelf for the reading group(s) in your area for

- ◆ reader comments on different books (with colour copies of the book covers)
- ◆ posters showing what the group is reading in future meetings
- ◆ news about special activities
- ◆ loan copies of books the group has read
- ◆ a file of information about the books and authors collected by the group over a season.

It will be useful to the group, and will be a way of tapping in to the members' enthusiasm for the sake of other readers in the library – it's a chance for readers to communicate with readers.

Library website

Remember to put stuff on your website

- ◆ details of your reading groups – where and when they meet, and a phone number or e-mail for contact
- ◆ meeting dates and the books to be read
- ◆ reader comments with book covers
- ◆ brief reports of meeting (with the odd photo?)

Local media

Some groups send short reports about their meetings and/or comments on the books they've read to the local newspaper or *papur bro*. It's good publicity for the group, for the library and for the books.

A ready audience

Once you have reading groups in your area, you have a core audience for other events such as author visits, book launches and literary festivals. Organisers from other arts agencies will welcome a chance to send publicity to reading groups, and increasingly the Welsh Books Council and publishers are realising the benefits of direct contact with readers via reading groups.

Websites for readers and reading groups

www.whichbook.net

Choose a book by your mood or the type of reading experience you're after. A useful source of reader comments, and you can find books set in a country or region, or with a specific plot type of reading experience.

www.cyfleiddianc.org

www.givemeabreak.org

Choose the type of break you'd like to have with a book. Bilingual.

www.bookgrouponline.com

Online discussion forum for readers.

www.thegoodbookguide.com

Independent book reviewing site for all types of books.

www.bookgroup.info

Site run by 5 readers. News and book reviews.

www.word-of-mouth.org.uk

Choose books recommended by readers with a similar reading profile to you. Readers' noticeboard.

<http://askchris.essexcc.gov.uk/welcome.asp>

Suggestions by readers, reading groups and librarians for what to read next. Includes a category of books read by groups. Opportunity to respond about books.

www.wakefield.gov.uk/CultureAndLeisure/Libraries/ReadersGroups/Booklists/default.htm

Themed booklists with reviews by reading groups members can be downloaded as pdf files.

www.bookbrowse.com

Useful for choosing books to read and over 300 reading guides. USA.

www.readinggroupguides.com

Over 1500 reading guides for reading groups. Useful links and lists. USA.

www.derbyshire.gov.uk/librar/book

The 'Book Chat List and Reading Guides' section has a collection of reading guides.

www.poetrybooks.co.uk

The Poetry Book Society. Advice and information for everyone who enjoys reading poetry. Advice on running a poetry reading group.

www.bookspot.com

Portal to book websites including many online reading groups. USA.

www.readinggroupchoies.com

List of reading guides by author, title and theme. USA.

www.crimetime.co.uk

Online crime fiction magazine. Useful links, reviews and news.

www.twbooks.co.uk

The Tangled Web site – crime and mystery fiction, science fiction, fantasy and horror from British publishers.

www.gnooks.com

A website to help you find authors similar to your favourites. Also an opportunity to discuss and buy books.

www.meettheauthor.com

Short video clips of authors promoting their own books – fiction and non-fiction.

www.readingagency.org.uk

The agency which supports libraries' work with readers. The Download Centre (under Reading Partners) has the Rolling Calendar giving information about forthcoming national reading promotions and broadcasts about books.

www.openingthebook.com

The reader development company offering reader-centred training, consultancy and products for libraries.

Publishers' websites for readers

www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/list.htm

Reading guides organised by *genre*. USA.

www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/

The Reading Group Center – advice on book discussions, reading guides, booklists and message board. USA.

www.penguin.co.uk

Section for reading groups – how to start a group, news, special offers, chance to send questions to authors, and competitions. Need to register.

www.readinggroups.co.uk

HarperCollins' site – basic reading guides (no discussion topics), suggestions of what to read next.

www.bloomsburymagazine.com/ReadersGroups/default.asp

Bloomsbury's website – reading club, reading guides, news, competitions. Need to register.

Book websites

www.gwales.com

The main website for Welsh and English books from Wales. Summaries, reviews, opportunity to respond, bibliographic details, book covers, booklists and online ordering. Contact details for Welsh publishers with links to their websites and online catalogues. Bilingual.

www.wbc.org.uk

The Welsh Books Council site – news about the book and publishing world in Wales. Details of the Book of the Month scheme and a list of the book reviews on gwales.com. Bilingual.

www.academi.org

Wales's literature promotion agency. Directory of Welsh writers, events listings and awards. Bilingual.

www.booktrust.org.uk

The charity promoting books and reading for all ages – news, information, booklists and campaigns.

www.amazon.co.uk

The bookselling site, and useful for knowing what's in print, for finding book covers, and looking for different *genres* or categories.

www.bbc.co.uk/cymru/adloniant/llyfrau

BBC Cymru's Llais Llên website with author interviews, book news and reviews. Welsh.

www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/arts

Websites for the Radio 4 book programmes (including Book Club, Good Read, Open Book, Front Row, Book of the Week, Book at Bedtime). Details of the books discussed and forthcoming programmes, and a 'listen again' facility to listen to programmes. Also includes links to the websites of all the UK's public libraries and their online catalogues.

www.bbc.co.uk/arts/books

More general site on books, literature, poetry and writing.

www.channel4.com/entertainment/tv/microsites/R/richardandjudy/book_club/book_club.html

Richard and Judy's successful book club. Book and author details and a chance to vote.

www.booksunlimited.co.uk

The Guardian – reviews, extracts, articles, news, interviews and quizzes.

www.enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books

The Independent – news, reviews, interviews.

www.oneword.co.uk

A digital radio station which includes books and discussion. Available on the internet or digital TV and radio.

www.readysteadybook.com

Literary fiction mostly. Useful for English literary publishers.

Book awards

www.academi.org/bookoftheyear

Wales's Book of the Year awards – for the best English and Welsh books of the year. Bilingual.

www.wbc.org.uk/child_awards.html

The Tir na n-Og Awards, The Mary Vaughan Jones award, The Welsh-language Children's Poet Laureate.

www.bookerprize.co.uk

News about the Booker prize, the books and the judges.

www.themanbookerprize.com/favourites

A readers' website suggesting the type of reading experience a reader can expect from the books on the Booker shortlist.

www.thecwa.co.uk

The Crime Writers' Association's Dagger awards for crime and mystery fiction.

www.impacdublinaward.ie

City libraries in 50 countries nominate books in any language for this award.

www.orangeprize.co.uk

The prize for a novel written by a woman. Close links with readers and libraries. Opportunity to respond to the books.

www.publishingnews.co.uk/pn/pnbb_index.asp

The British Books Awards.

www.rna-uk.org

The Romantic Novelists Association's awards for romance fiction.

www.thetravelbookaward.com

The award for literary travel writing.

www.whitbread-bookawards.co.uk

Prizes for the year's best fiction, first novel, biography, poetry and children's book, with one overall winner.

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/guardianfirstbookaward2004>

The Guardian first book award.

www.thedylanthomasprize.com

A new international prize for authors under 30 years of age who write in English.

www.literature-awards.com/bookawards.htm

Access to dozens of book awards around the globe. Parts are dated but a useful archive. USA.

Special needs

www.nlb-online.org

Access to all the services provided by the National Library for the Blind and advice on including people with visual impairment in reading groups.

www.revealweb.org.uk

Database of all the books available in alternative formats (large print, braille and audio CD/cassette) available from a range of organisations such as the NLB and RNIB.

www.calibre.org.uk

Fee-based audio book loan service.

www.rnib.org.uk

Includes good practice guidelines on creating accessible resources, and a section on Wales with contact details for Welsh language resources.

Who else writes like ...? A readers' guide to fiction authors

Roy & Jeanne Huse (ed)

LISU 2002 ISBN 1901786579

Adult sequels 13th edition

Mandy Hicken (ed)

Career Development Group 2004 ISBN
1901353095

Good Fiction Guide

Jane Rogers (ed)

Oxford University Press 2002 ISBN 0192800833

Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide

Nick Rennison (ed)

Bloomsbury 2004 ISBN 0747572348

Bloomsbury Good Reading Guide to Crime Fiction

Nick Rennison (ed)

Bloomsbury 2003 ISBN 0747560897

The Reading Group Toolbox

Rachel van Riel & Olive Fowler

Opening the Book 1999 ISBN1902603176

The Reading Groups Book

Jenny Hartley

Oxford University Press 2002 ISBN 0199255962

Essential Guide for Reading Groups

Susan Osborne

Bloomsbury 2002 ISBN 0747572119

Good Books Lately: the one-stop resource for book groups and other greedy readers

Ellen Moore & Kira Stevens

St Martin's Griffin Press (New York) 2004

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A bimonthly magazine for readers and reading groups. Articles about books, extracts, comments and reviews by readers. Chance to get free books. www.newbooksmag.com

<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you re-read?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read outdoors?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Are you influenced if a book is a prize-winner?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read in public?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you have a favourite chair to read in?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Are you looking for something familiar or something new?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Choose a book you can remember where you were when you first read it.</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Which character would you like to be?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>What makes you give up on a book before the end?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read to expand your mind?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you prefer reading books set in the countryside or in the city?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>What else do you do whilst reading?</p>

<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Was there a period in your life when reading was not so important?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Where is the most unusual place you've read a book?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read the latest hot books to keep up?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Have you ever read a book for help during a difficult time?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you prefer to read about familiar or unfamiliar places?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Why do you come to a reading group?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Have you ever been disappointed by a book?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you think about what books other people see you reading?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>With whom do you talk about the books you read?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>What do you read in the dentist's or doctor's waiting room?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Where do you keep your books at home?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Does size matter?</p>

<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read for short or long chunks of time?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you sometimes read to protect yourself or to hide?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you get rid of books?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>How do you mark where you've reached in a book?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you look at the end before you get there?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>What's most likely to annoy you about a book?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Can you read while other things are going on around you?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Why did you choose the book you're reading at the moment?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you have more than one book on the go at the same time?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>When you go on holiday, do you read a book set in that place?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you prefer characters that are like you or unlike you?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Have you ever had a fright whilst reading?</p>

<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>What sort of book do you avoid?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you always finish a book once you've started?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you stay up late to finish a book?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>How do you start to read a book?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Have you ever lied about what you're reading?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you enjoy listening to someone else reading aloud?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you always read in bed before going to sleep?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>How do you decide what to read next?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you cry when you read?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read to relax?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you remember a book from your childhood?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Is there a book you've been meaning to read for ages?</p>
<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Do you read in the bath?</p>	<p>Dear Reader ...</p> <p>Have you ever laughed out loud when reading in a public place?</p>	

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Blast from the past

<p>What do you remember about your experience reading this book?</p>	<p>Where and when did you read this book?</p>
<p>How did you come across it in the first place?</p>	<p>Is the design of the book in your hand different from the version you read? In what ways?</p>
<p>What do you remember about the book's contents?</p>	<p>Would you want to re-read the book?</p>

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To each a role

<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>bring the wine</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>bring the biscuits/ sweets</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>present your Brilliant Beginning and Excellent End</p>
<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>bring some background information about the author</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>bring reviews or comments about the book for newspapers or websites</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>lead the discussion</p>
<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>introduce the book</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>look after any new member</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>make sure the next books are available</p>
<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>make a note of the comments and the chat</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>help with the refreshments and the clearing up at the end</p>	<p>Next time, please will you ...</p> <p>put your energy into helping others to express their thoughts rather than doing so yourself</p>

<p>Was it what you expected?</p>	<p>Did your feelings change as you read through the book?</p>
<p>Did you start slowly or did you get stuck in straight away?</p>	<p>Did someone or something annoy you?</p>
<p>Which character did you react to most strongly?</p>	<p>What did you think of the ending?</p>

<p>With whom did you empathise most?</p>	<p>Would you recommend it to anyone else?</p>
<p>With which character would you like to spend time on a desert island?</p>	<p>What gave you a fright?</p>
<p>Was there one really memorable scene?</p>	<p>If you didn't finish the book, can you explain why it didn't grab you?</p>

<p>How did you feel after you'd finished the book?</p>	<p>What sort of reader would enjoy this book?</p>
<p>Does the book remind you of any other book or film, or a personal experience?</p>	<p>How should the book have finished?</p>
<p>Did you prefer some characters to others?</p>	<p>What do you think of the book cover and design?</p>

<p>Who was your favourite character?</p>	<p>Would you have chosen this book normally?</p>
<p>Were parts of the book more readable than others?</p>	<p>Which part of the book gave you the most difficulty?</p>

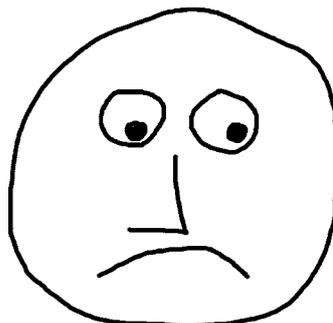
Mmm

More please



Yuck

No more, thanks



23 | Bookmarking

This is where I stopped to think about my reaction to the first chunk I read

This is where I really got into the book and knew I'd carry on reading it

This is where I started to lose interest in the book

This is the last page I read

First impressions

What's hooked me in?

Why?

Was it worth it?

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Expectations

Expectations

Expectations

Tip for another reader

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