

One Book, One Denver's Book Club Guide



One Book, One Denver's Book Club Guide

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What is One Book, One Denver?

One Book, One Denver is a citywide book club established to help build community and stimulate people to read. The book club runs September through October of every year and voting for the year's selection takes place in June.

Synopsis of the Book

Enzo knows he is different from other dogs: a philosopher with a nearly human soul (and an obsession with opposable thumbs), he has educated himself by watching television extensively, and by listening very closely to the words of his master, Denny Swift, an up-and-coming race car driver.

Through Denny, Enzo has gained tremendous insight into the human condition, and he sees that life, like racing, isn't simply about going fast. Using the techniques needed on the race track, one can successfully navigate all of life's ordeals.

On the eve of his death, Enzo takes stock of his life, recalling all that he and his family have been through: the sacrifices Denny has made to succeed professionally; the unexpected loss of Eve, Denny's wife; the three-year battle over their daughter, Zoë, whose maternal grandparents pulled every string to gain custody. In the end, despite what he sees as his own limitations, Enzo comes through heroically to preserve the Swift family, holding in his heart the dream that Denny will become a racing champion with Zoë at his side. Having learned what it takes to be a compassionate and successful person, the wise canine can barely wait until his next lifetime, when he is sure he will return as a man.

A heart-wrenching but deeply funny and ultimately uplifting story of family, love, loyalty, and hope, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* is a beautifully crafted and captivating look at the wonders and absurdities of human life . . . as only a dog could tell it.

www.bn.com

About the Author

Garth Stein is the pen name of Comet, a golden retriever mutt who dictates his profound and brilliantly plotted novels to his owner, the real Garth Stein, who likes to take credit for Comet's brilliant work and insights into canine minds.

As for Garth, the author of *New York Times* bestselling literary novel *The Art of Racing in the Rain* (Harper, 2008), he's been busy touring independent bookstores and writing his next, as yet untitled novel (with Comet's help). Published in 23 languages so far, *The Art of Racing in the Rain* has received a 2008 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Book Award, and has been made a #1 BookSense selection and a Starbucks book selection. Garth's previous novels include *How Evan Broke His Head and Other Secrets*, which also won a PNBA award and was a BookSense pick, and *Raven Stole the Moon*. So far, Comet (the real genius behind these books) has enjoyed all of the awards and critical acclaim, but wishes they came with dog biscuits.

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With an M.F.A. in film from Columbia University (1990), Garth worked as a documentary filmmaker for several years, and directed, produced, or coproduced several award-winning films. Garth also took the time to write a full-length play, *Brother Jones*.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Seattle, Garth's ancestry is diverse: his mother, a native of Alaska, is of Tlingit Indian and Irish descent; his father, a Brooklyn native, is the child of Jewish emigrants from Austria. After spending his childhood in Seattle and then living in New York City for 18 years, Garth returned to Seattle, where he currently lives with his wife, three sons, and their dog, Comet.

What's the Buzz?

- SARA GRUEN, AUTHOR OF WATER FOR ELEPHANTS

"***The Art of Racing in the Rain*** has everything: love, tragedy, redemption, danger, and - most especially - the canine narrator Enzo. I loved this book."

www.garthstein.com

- WALLY LAMB, AUTHOR OF I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE

"Since finishing this engagingly unique novel, I've found myself staring at my own dog, thinking, Hmm, I wonder..."

www.garthstein.com

THE PORTLAND OREGONIAN

"...one of those stories that may earn its place next to Richard Bach's 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull,' Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist,' and Yann Martel's 'Life of Pi'...It's magic indeed..."

www.garthstein.com

TORONTO STAR

NOVEL MELTS LIFE, AUTO RACING

"***The Art of Racing in the Rain*** is not an instructional manual. It is a fictitious novel that pulls at your emotions. Love, devotion, death and betrayal -- life's highs and lows, all paralleled with the sport of automobile racing and narrated by a dog named Enzo..."

www.garthstein.com

THE DALLES CHRONICLE

Stein's book stunning.

A book written from the point of view of a dog, and lies dying? Yes it is, and ***The Art of Racing in the Rain*** is simply superb. Seattle writer Garth Stein has put more wisdom, humanity and insight into Enzo the dog's thoughts than are found in most human characters in most books. Enzo is devoted to Denny Swift, a semi-pro race driver based in Seattle. From Denny he learns the love of racing. A dog of profound understanding, he curses his lack of an opposable thumb, and the big floppy tongue, that won't allow him to form words, which he understands thoroughly. Enzo's relationship with Denny, his wife Eve and their daughter Zoe are complex and completely absorbing. This is no Pollyanna book. Some hard things happen, but they are balanced by joy. "Racing" is sweet without bathos, profoundly moving throughout, and with a perfect ending coda.

Highly recommend

-- RODGER NICHOLS

THE SEATTLE TIMES

"Stein's Enzo is the perfect narrator, wickedly observant of the world around him, even if limited in his ability to interact with humans..."

www.garthstein.com

The How To's...

How to Start a Book Club & Keep Your Members

Interested in starting a book club but don't know where to start? We have pulled some helpful hints and tips to get you started.

5 Things to Think About Before Starting a Book Club

- Decide what kind of books you want to read. Not every book club has to have a theme, but if you go the "random" route, you should at least collectively decide what kind of books no one wants to spend weeks struggling through. For instance, if you have a group of mystery lovers, other kinds of fiction might be ok, but self-help manifestos should probably be outlawed. Being honest (and up front) with your fellow readers in the beginning about the fact that graphic novels make your skin crawl will help avoid tension later.
- Hammer out the logistics. You might think things like food, beverages and location are small details that matter less than the actual content of your club, but little sticking points like where to have it, who's bringing the food and -- perhaps most importantly -- what to drink while you're gabbing can become big issues later on. Figure out in advance whether whoever's hosting will provide the hors d'oeuvres or it's a potluck deal so no one ends up contributing more than their share and getting pouty.
- Keep the invitation open. It's tempting to limit your book club to a certain number of people, just to keep things simple and make sure your get-togethers are manageable and comfortable. This is completely understandable, and if you've got a solid group and you know everyone's going to show up to every time, go for it. However, the truth about most book clubs is that they usually have a pretty substantial turnover rate. People have kids, they move, change jobs, adopt puppies and do all sorts of other things that make it impossible for them to show up to your club. This is why it's important to keep the invitation open. Always be on the lookout for potential members so your club doesn't fall on its face every time there's a big sale or a season finale.
- Set out your style. Agree in advance what kind of style your club will have. Do you hate interrupters so much that you want to bring along a talking stick, or are you cool with everyone jumping into the fray (and may the loudest one win)? Should you choose only books that come with discussion questions in the back, or are you happy coming up with your own? And is it ok to talk about that month's book for a little while and then move onto more enticing subjects like work, kids, celebrity gossip and weekend plans? Set expectations in advance.
- Moderate the moderators. It's a good idea to come to a mutual decision about how you want your moderators to get the job done. First off, is the hostess always the moderator, and does that person have carte blanche to choose whatever book they want the group to read? Do you like a structured environment, in which the moderator asks questions and calls on people to answer, or can the he just throw out a discussion topic and let the commentary commence?

<http://www.book-clubs-resource.com/book-clubs/before-starting.php>

Tips for Starting and Running a Successful Book Club

- Do consider friends and/or stranger-acquaintances as candidates. The important criterion is interest in the process. A stranger will not stay one for long. Friendships may strengthen or strain. Even if a group population is diverse, common bonds will be formed.
- Do determine your own logistics/wish-list before you begin to organize. Know the time slot (which day or evening of the month and frequency) and what type of books you want to read before the first organizational meeting.

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- Do consider what atmosphere you desire. Serious/academic/scholarly or social/therapeutic/bonding. Conscientiously separate the socializing from the discussion. For example: "House open at 7:00PM for coffee, desert and gossip, discussion begins at 7:30PM."
- Do learn from a reference librarian how to retrieve author info and the critical reviews from mainstream publications, library publications, the Internet. These can aid a discussion, interject ideas. Pursue research on minute details, such as a book title or a sign of the zodiac, mentioned in the text; they may offer clues to authorial meaning. A book group offers an opportunity to learn. Consider it an enjoyable form of continuing education.
- Do decide on a title selection policy. Examples: Discussion of candidates followed by voting, simple majority winning; hostess gets to pick the book; volunteer member-leader gets to pick. (The last one is valuable in that the one who picks the book already has desire and enthusiasm for it.) Try a policy for a while; it can always be reevaluated and changed.
- Do try to choose titles that 1) stretch your mind and 2) warrant collaborative discussion. Mainstream "escape" fiction that is formulaic (written with a facile, fill-in-the-blank formula) does not lend itself well to in-depth quality discussions. If you have trouble choosing, start with prize winners. (Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, National Book Critics Circle Award, Before Christopher Columbus Award, Nebula and Hugo [science fiction awards]. Try reading banned books or those that special interest groups are crusading to have banned. (Your librarian can give you a list.)
- Do be spontaneous in your discussions. Make sure everyone has an opportunity to get her/his two cents in. Speak up. Listen to others! Listening skills are of primary importance. Make an effort to research them, learn them, and practice them--for book group, and as a life skill.
- Do avoid a collapse or lapse in discussion. See "How to Discuss a Book: from Leaders to Members" for possible discussion questions.
- Do remember and respect the theory that there is no right or wrong in the art of literary interpretation. For literary analysis, your opinion(s) should be based on detail(s) from the text. For social camaraderie, allow the text to project your persona. Avoid pomposity and didacticism. (Leave your egos at home! Break up fist fights!) Have fun engaging in the process of shared exploration. And be careful. Group grope can be addictive!

<http://www.bookmuse.com/pages/resources/starting.asp>

Suggestions on How to Start a Book Club

- Get together a core group - It is much easier to start a book club with two or three people who already have some connection. Ask around the office, play groups, or your church or civic organizations. Sometimes you might find enough people to start a book club right away. Often you'll at least recruit some help in completing the rest of the steps. (New to the area? Skip to step three)
- Set a regular meeting time - An ideal size for a book club is 8 - 11 people. As you can imagine, it is often difficult to coordinate that many schedules. Go ahead and set a regular meeting time and date for your book club with your core group. For instance, my book club meets the second Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. By setting the time before advertising the book club, you avoid playing favorites when working around schedules and are up front about what commitment is required.
- Advertise your book club - The best advertising is often word of mouth. If you have a core group of three, and you each know two people who want to join, then all you have to do to start a book club is ask these people. This is a good way to meet friends of friends. If your core group doesn't know of other people to ask, then advertise in your circles of interest (school, work, church) with fliers or announcements. There are often also places to post fliers at the library, book stores and cafes.

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- Establish ground rules - Get together with your potential book club members and set the group's ground rules. (You might want everyone's input; however, if you have set ideas of what you want, then set the rules with your core group and announce them at this first meeting). The ground rules should include how books are chosen, who hosts, who leads discussions and what kind of commitment is expected (See Tips Below). If you did not set the meeting time with your core group, do that now.
- Meet - Set a schedule for the first few months and start meeting. If the book club is small at first, don't worry about it. Invite people as you go. Some people will be more likely to join an already established book club because they feel less pressure than they would as a founding member.
- Keep meeting and inviting people - Even if your book club is an ideal size, from time to time you'll have the chance to invite new people as other members move away or drop out. Don't be discouraged if you lose members. People's schedules and commitments change. Hopefully you'll always have a core group, and together you can reload.

http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubresources/ht/start_book_club.htm

Key Points to add new members:

- Before you can add someone new, each core group member should host at least once.
 1. You can go around longer if you choose but once is necessary.
- Before asking your candidate to join you should talk it over with the core group members.
 1. This is not like some sorority, vote the popular girl in thing! It's just a common courtesy to the original group. That way if there are any concerns (somebody doesn't get along well with somebody or it's somebody's mother in law and they will have trouble talking openly in front of her) it's brought up before your foot is in your mouth and you have to find a way to "unask" the person you've already asked. Be fair to each other when you add new members.
- This point goes hand in hand with the above point - you don't want everyone in your group to be best friends!
 1. Having a group that is too familiar with each other opens a whole new can of worms. Think about what would happen if you got two sets of moms and daughters into a small room with the sole purpose of talking about their opinions? While this could be great Jerry Springer entertainment, it can lead to a lack of respect for each other. I'm not saying it always happens but in my experience it's a sticky situation.
 2. The core group may know each other well but the additional members should be people from each of your separate lives. For example, in our current group my mom decided to ask her neighbor to join us, while Vera (another core member) asked her son's girlfriend to jump in. This brought in two new personalities and viewpoints to the discussion that we didn't have before. You want diversity! It's a good thing! Book club discussions are boring when everybody agrees!

<http://www.book-club-queen.com/add-new-members.html>

How to Find & Select a Book Club

Book clubs are a great way to meet new people and connect with old friends but finding the right book club for you can be a challenge. Hopefully this guide will aid you in finding the perfect fit for you!

To Join a Book Club:

- Decide what type of book club you want to join. There are many different kinds of book clubs. Some are comprised of members of a certain neighborhood or group (such as a church) and others have broader membership but are dedicated to a certain type of book (i.e. nonfiction, graphic novels, etc.). Decide what you want to get out of the book club. Are you looking primarily to meet new people or to explore a certain type of book.
- Find a club that meets your needs. Local, independent bookstores are your best resource. Many bookstores sponsor book clubs or at least allow clubs to advertise. Find a club that interests you and contact the organizer for information on how to join.
- Buy and read the club's current book. If it is a bookstore-sponsored group, the store will often have a special display for club books and may even offer them at a discount. Make sure you get the book in time to finish it. Most clubs meet once a month, so try to get the book at least a few weeks in advance.
- Talk to the group's organizer and get to know the vibe of the group. Some groups take the books they read very seriously, others use them as an excuse to get together and socialize. Talking with the organizer and, if possible, other members before the first meeting will help you know what to expect.
- At the first meeting, don't be shy, but don't be a bore either. People don't join book clubs to listen to long droning lectures, so don't over prepare with too many comments on the book. Just add your two cents in an unpretentious fashion and make amiable, non-book related small talk and you should fit in to the group in no time.

http://www.ehow.com/print/how_2311939_join-book-club.html#ixzz0s9y55Lsg

How to find a book club near you:

- Use connections to find a book club. Ask neighbors, friends and coworkers about reading groups in the area. Consult with people who are able to provide recommendations about a book club. Save yourself the trouble of attending the meeting, only to find it isn't what you had in mind.
- Look for book club leads in the local media. Find meeting notices in the society section of newspapers, or turn on the TV, and go to the local access channel to check for meeting posts.
- Find a local book club by asking a librarian. Query the staff to recommend reading groups. Most libraries in mid to large-size communities have multiple book clubs from which to choose. For instance, there may be a morning book club, an evening book club or a movie book club.
- Browse local book shops for a club. Go to the nearest bookstore and find out more information about book clubs.
- Find a local book club in directories online. Visit websites that lists local gatherings according to interest. One such website is Meetup.com, which allows users to locate a book club by ZIP code.

http://www.ehow.com/print/how_4493947_find-local-book-club.html#ixzz0sABd40pd

How to Run a Book Club

Set the basic ground rules first:

- Members who haven't read the book
Come anyway. Not everyone can finish every book, but non-readers may still have valuable insights.
- Disagreements about the book
Be gracious! There is no one way to experience or interpret a book. In fact, differing opinions are good.
- Members who prefer to socialize
Be gentle but firm. Insist that discussion time be limited to the book. Some clubs hold book discussions first and invite "social members" to join afterward.
- Dominating personalities
Never easy. "Let's hear from some others" is one approach. Some clubs pass an object around the room; you talk only when you hold the object. If the person continues to dominate, a friendly phone call (never e-mail) might work. If all fails, sometimes they've just got to go—for the good of the club.

http://litlovers.com/how_to_run_book_club.htm

How to Discuss a Book: From Leaders to Members

Discussing a book seems simple enough but in a book club you want to talk about more than if the members liked the book or not. This section is intended to provide useful insight to lead a great discussion as well as how to be an active book club member.

Tips to Get the Discussion Going:

Prior to the first meeting, there should be a clear understanding of who is going to lead this and subsequent discussions. For instance, some groups have one person who is the official book club conversation-starter, while other groups take turns among members who would like to get the conversation started. There is no right way for groups to handle the discussion leadership role, it comes down to what works best for a particular group.

http://book-clubs.suite101.com/article.cfm/starting_a_book_club_the_discussion#ixzz0rt2pWYtD

- Read the book - This may seem obvious, but it is the most important step, so it is worth stating. It is a good idea to plan on finishing the book a little earlier than you might otherwise so that you have time to think about it and prepare before your book club meets.
- Write down important page numbers - If there are parts of the book that made an impact on you or that you think may come up in discussion, write down the page numbers so that you can access the passages easily while preparing and leading your book club discussion.
- Come up with eight to ten questions about the book - Check out our ready-to-go book club discussion questions on bestsellers. Print them out and you are done with this step.
- Want to come up with your own questions? Check out the tips for writing book club discussion questions below.
- Let others answer first - When you are asking questions, you want to facilitate discussion, not come off as a teacher. By letting others in the book club answer first, you will promote conversation and help everyone feel like their opinions matter.
- Note: Sometimes people may need to think before they answer. Part of being a good leader is being comfortable with silence. Don't feel like you have to jump in if no one answers immediately. If needed, clarify, expand or rephrase the question.
- Make connections between comments - If someone gives an answer to question 2 that connects well with question 5, don't feel obligated to ask questions 3 and 4 before moving to 5. You are the leader and you can go in whatever order you want. Even if you go in order, try to find a link

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between an answer and the next question. By connecting people's comments to the questions, you'll help build momentum in the conversation.

- Occasionally direct questions toward quiet people - You don't want to put anyone on the spot, but you want everyone to know their opinions are valued. If you have a few talkative people who always jump right in, directing a question to a specific person may help draw out the quieter people (and let the loud people know it is time to give someone else a turn).
- Rein in tangents - Book clubs are popular not only because people like to read, but also because they are great social outlets. A little off topic conversation is fine, but you also want to respect the fact that people have read the book and expect to talk about it. As the facilitator, it is your job to recognize tangents and bring the discussion back to the book.
- Don't feel obligated to get through all the questions - The best questions sometimes lead to intense conversations. That's a good thing! The questions are there as a guide. While you will want to get through at least three or four questions, it will probably be rare that you finish all ten. Respect people's time by wrapping up the discussion when the meeting time is over rather than pushing on until you finish everything you planned.
- Wrap up the discussion - One good way to wrap up a conversation and help people summarize their opinions of the book is to ask each person to rate the book on a scale of one to five.
http://bestsellers.about.com/od/bookclubresources/ht/how_lead_talk.htm
- Now you need to get the meeting started and, if the group is newly formed or you think needs a refresher, remind them of the 'rules' of your book group and how much time you have to discuss the book.
 - Suggestion: A minute or two reviewing the 'rules' of your group can be time well spent. If you or other members feel there has been a problem in earlier meetings (e.g. one person dominating the conversation or too much off-topic conversation), this is the appropriate time to remind people what was previously agreed, without it appearing to be a personal attack on an individual.
- Get an initial reaction from people about the book. It's quite likely one or two might not have finished it (maybe they ran out of time or just found it tedious) - it's not a big deal, this is supposed to be fun, not a test. Having said that, if after a couple of meetings you find many people aren't finishing the books in time you might want to review the types of books you're reading and/or extend the time between meetings, or check whether the people who aren't finishing the books actually want to be part of the book club!
- Don't be too rigid keeping people on topic.
- In other words, the person who appears to be off topic maybe finding a way to express and understand an experience in their own lives - so don't be too quick to redirect them!
http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/moderating_meetings

Be a good Leader, tips to effectively leading the discussion:

- Come prepared with 10 to 15 open-ended questions. Questions that can be answered yes or no tend to cut off discussion quickly.
- Alternatively, ask each member of the group to come with one discussion question. Readers will focus on different aspects of the book, and everyone will gain new insights as a result.
- Toss *one question* at a time out to the group. Use our Book Discussion Resources for help.
- Choose a *primary character* and ask members to comment on him or her. Consider:
 - Character traits, motivations, how he/she affects the story's events and characters, or revealing quotations.
- Play a *literary game*. Use one of our Icebreaker activities. They're smart and fun—guaranteed to loosen you up and get your discussion off to a lively, even uproarious start.

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- Distribute *hand-outs* to everyone in order to refresh memories or use as talking points. Identify the primary characters and summarize the plot.

<http://www.bookmovement.com/info/startabookclub>

Be a good member, tips on how to read for discussion:

- Make notes and mark pages as you go.
Ask questions of yourself and mark down pages you might want to refer back to. Making notes as you go slows down your reading but saves you the time of searching out important passages later.
- Ask tough questions of yourself and the book.
Asking questions of yourself as you read means you don't know the answer yet, and sometimes you never will discover the answers. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions because often the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose. Look for questions that may lead to in-depth conversations with your group and make the book more meaningful.
- Analyze the themes of the book.
Try to analyze the important themes of a book and consider what premise the author started with. Imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking himself, "what if..." questions.
- Get to know the characters.
When you meet the characters in the book, place yourself at the scene. Think about their faults and their motives. What would it be like to interact with them? Are the tone and style of their dialogue authentic? Read portions aloud to get to know the voices of the characters.
- Notice the structure of the book.
Sometimes an author uses the structure of the book to illustrate an important concept or to create a mood. Notice how the author structured the book. Are chapters prefaced by quotes? If so, how do they apply to the content of the chapters? How many narrators tell the story? Who are they? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Is it written in flashbacks? Does the order the author chose make sense to you?
- Make comparisons to other books and authors.
Compare the book to others by the same author, or to books by other authors that have a similar theme or style. Often, themes run through an author's works that are more fully realized by comparison. Comparing one author's work with another's can help you solidify your opinions, as well as define for you qualities you may otherwise miss.

How to participate in a book discussion

- *Avoid "like" or "dislike."* Those terms aren't very helpful for moving discussions forward, and they can make others feel defensive. Instead, talk about your experience, how you felt as you read the book.
- *Support your views.* Use specific passages from the book as evidence for your ideas. This is a literary analysis technique called "close reading."
- *Read with pencil.* Take notes or jot down particularly interesting passages: something that strikes you or that you question.

http://litlovers.com/how_to_discuss_book.htm

How to Handle Difficult Situations

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From time to time difficult situations will arise and advice is needed on how to handle the situation without offending anyone. These are some possible scenarios of difficult situations.

- *One of our members keeps on putting down the opinions of others in the group*
It's difficult to imagine a good discussion without disagreement - but there are ways to express a difference of opinion in a constructive way that builds trust and openness within the group - and then there are ways to crush somebody so that they never feel comfortable opening their mouth in public again!

Something to consider here is that some people actively enjoy a robust debate, while others don't - but at no point is it appropriate to belittle another person's opinion, or to repeatedly interrupt them before they've been able to have their say.

If you feel that someone in your group is too strident in their disagreement with another member, consider taking the person aside and gently pointing out what they're doing - they're probably not aware of the effect they're having (and it's probably not just at your book group meetings that they're doing this!). However, before doing this, make sure that this person is actually considered out of line by the other members of the group. It is possible that you are being oversensitive and the others do not consider this member's conversational style to be an issue.

The most important thing you can do is make sure that *you* practice good communication skills yourself. For example, if a person is interrupted by another, when the latter has stopped speaking, immediately steer the conversation back to what the first speaker was saying and ask them to talk more on the subject, or make reference to what they said when you next speak and build on their thoughts. Even if you don't agree with their viewpoint you can, at least, acknowledge that you have heard it and respect their right to have that view!

- *One member of our reading group always dominates - what can we do?*
If the problem is that one or more people tend to talk too long and too much and it has been a problem at previous meetings, try tackling this issue at the start of the meeting and ask for suggestions from the group.

If people consistently interrupt each other (and members of the group consider this a problem) consider using a timer and don't allow interruptions until the speaker has had their say (for a maximum of 2-3 minutes), or pass around a small object, such as a ball, and only the person holding the ball can speak.

- *One member of our group rarely speaks - what should we do?*
Some people speak a lot and some don't. Quantity of speech is often in inverse proportion to the quality of the thinking behind it so if somebody is fully engaged in the discussion but only chooses to speak occasionally, there's really no need to 'do' anything about it.

However, if somebody in your book club really says very little at all (and especially if it is a small group) try and find opportunities to draw them out. For example, make a comment yourself and ask the person directly whether they agree or disagree - but go gently - perhaps the person is having trouble getting a word in edgeways with all the other opinionated people in the room and will welcome your question, but equally they might be perfectly comfortable listening to other people's opinions and feel threatened at a direct question.

Try and see things from the individual's point of view. Perhaps they're new to the group or feel that everybody else knows each other but they don't. Or perhaps they think they aren't as well read as the rest of you. Whether this is reality or perception doesn't really matter - you need to find a way to make them feel comfortable in the group, and when they are they'll be more likely to contribute

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their thoughts. One suggestion is to try and get to know the person better in the conversational time before the formal discussion starts and perhaps even find out his/her views on the book, one to one. That way, if he/she stays silent in the discussion you can make a comment along the lines of 'Alice made a really good point when we were discussing the book before the meeting about xxxx' and ask if she could share it with the group. Preferably, try to sit next to, or near, your reticent friend because when the eyes of the room turn to hear her speak she'll feel more supported if she has someone sitting near her who she knows already values her opinions.

As a general rule, when somebody is new to the group it is always a good idea to spend a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting getting to know him/her, and giving him/her a chance to get to know you, either through informal discussion or by playing a group game.

- *We used to meet to discuss books but now it's turned into a gourmet extravaganza with very little time left to discuss the book. It's getting out of hand - worse still, it's my turn to bring the food and I don't know what to make.*

If your group rotates bringing food it's very easy for each person to try to do a little better than the one before and, before you know it, bringing the snack has gone from a quick rustle through the cupboard before leaving for the meeting to something that has to be planned and worried about well in advance.

It takes a bit of courage to do this but the best thing you can do for all concerned is to turn up with something simple - a packet of cookies, cheese and crackers, or a plate of vegetables and a dip - the other members of the group will probably breath a sigh of relief that the pressure is off!

Alternatively, if the group members like to flex their culinary muscles, you could suggest that the food for the meetings be kept simple but that every now and then you have a 'theme' evening based on the particular book you're discussing and everybody brings a dish appropriate to the period the book is set in, or its geographical location. You could even go to town and turn it into a costume party with members dressing as one of the characters or, at least, in theme with the book. Why not invite a guest - spouse, partner, sister, friend - and turn it into a party? Then next month you can get back to the cheese, crackers and 'real' book discussion again!

- *We're a newly formed group and one person is making life a misery for the rest of us, she arrives drunk and is offensive.*

If you've read this reading guide section from start to finish you've probably already heard me say once, if not twice, that if you're forming a new group with people you don't know that you should meet in a public place until you get to know each other reasonably well, and only then meet in people's houses. I added this comment some years ago after receiving an email from a book club member who, along with the other club members, was being actively harassed by an abusive member of the group who they wished would become an ex-member. Things had reached the point where they had decided to stop meeting rather than confront the individual, but she continued to telephone and visit their homes wanting to know details of the next meeting.

The chances of you finding yourself in such an extreme situation maybe unlikely, but a little caution can go a long way, so don't share personal details, such as your mailing address or phone number, until you feel confident of the group - you don't even have to share your regular email address as you can always get a free account from Hotmail, Yahoo etc.

- *One of our members wrote a four-page synopsis of one of the books we were reading and read it to us at our meeting. It was quite interesting, but ever since then she brings a summary of every book we read and insists on reading it to us. We're so bored listening to her regurgitating the storyline that we all know. What do we do - she's very nice and we don't want to hurt her feelings?*

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This may seem an unlikely situation but it's one that has come up in various shapes and forms a few times. If you encounter a person who insists on taking center stage at each meeting (and you really don't feel able to just ask her not to) you need to find a way to 'redirect' her. For example, in this case, one solution would be to thank her for her input but suggest that it would be even more useful if she could summarize the book and the discussion *after* the meeting (essentially, making her the meeting secretary, responsible for recording the key points of the conversation). Most importantly encourage her to email the summary to the members *before* the next meeting so there is no need to discuss it at the next meeting - but make sure to thank her at the meeting!

http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/difficult_meetings

- **Communication is Key.** As the month moves on people get busy, things come up - life happens. This can seriously dampen the momentum that was built at the last meeting. If it's your turn to host a few pieces of communication are necessary to keep everyone on track and looking forward to the next get together.
 - First - Follow up letter or email the day after the meeting reminding everyone of the book you've chosen. Be sure to include the Who, What, When and Where for the next event!
 - Second - Invitation about 3-5 days BEFORE your next meeting reminding members of all relevant information and any special instructions you might have for them.

<http://www.book-club-queen.com/communication.html>

How to Keep it Fresh

Even well established book clubs need to keep things exciting and new. Here are some ways to do just that!

- ***New Members:*** Even in the most successful of clubs, people will move away or their circumstances will change. New people mean new ideas and views and can stop a club from becoming stale. Post regular notices in public places to raise awareness of the club and ensure a constant stream of new group members.
- ***Radio Dramatizations:*** Radio dramatizations are often abridged versions of a book. These can be an interesting way to get a different view on a book. The 'play on demand' service at radio stations such as the BBC means that radio programs can be listened to at any time up to 7 days after first broadcast and can be accessed for free through the internet. The club can listen to a dramatization and discuss this along side the book.
- ***Television and Film Dramatizations:*** These can bring a book to life. The dramatizations are often available on video or dvd and discussing the film compared with the book will make for an interesting meeting.
- ***Author Talks:*** Authors will often be willing to talk at book clubs. This might take form of a question and answer session, or the author may give some insight into their writing process. As it is customary to pay expenses, it can be a good idea for a number of book clubs to join together for such an event.
- ***Outings and Visits:*** Many bestselling authors use real locations within their books. These make excellent places for a book club to visit during or after reading a relevant book. Some towns and cities welcome the tourism that is generated through an author's work, offering organized tours to visitors.
- ***Other Clubs:*** Sometimes combining a meeting with another club will provide some fresh insight and motivation. There may be another local book club who would be interested in a joint event. Inter-club quizzes are often fun and there are numerous bestseller related trivia and quiz resources on the Internet.
- **Have time off:** This might seem an extreme way to keep the club fresh, however missing a month, say at Christmas or during the busy holiday period will give people a chance to do other things and come back to the fresh and invigorated!

How to Save Some Green

The whole point of a book club is to save you money, but there are still a few sneaky tricks you can use to make sure you get the absolute most out of your club. Here are 5 tips you may not know that are guaranteed to keep you in the green while you stock up on your favorite page-turners.

- *Lump orders to save on shipping* -- One no-brainer way to save on your club books is to buy more at a time to save yourself the shipping costs. Many clubs charge a flat fee for shipping -- say, \$2.45. If it's going to cost you the same amount either way, why not buy all your books at in the beginning so you end up paying only about \$5 in handling fees (the cost of two shipments), as opposed to \$10 (the cost of four shipments)?
- *Take advantage of "initial book" offers* -- A lot of book clubs hook you up with an awesome initial offer (such as 5 books for \$1 each, etc.) and give you the option to buy another book for a discount, if you order it with your introductory package. "But I just got 5 books! That's more than enough!" you're thinking. Maybe so, but taking advantage of this deal (which usually lets you save something like 50% on your first commitment book and reduces your commitment by 1 titles) and others like it are best way to squeeze the most savings out of your club membership and make sure you don't pay a penny more for any title than you absolutely have to.
- *Save with special offers and deals* -- As a card-carrying book club member, one of the biggest perks you get is the extra savings that come from the special sales and promotions that come via email and snail mail. Check out the club catalog to take advantage of limited-time discounts, coupon codes, 2-for-1 deals, markdowns and more.
- *Choose discount books* -- Another common-sense way to hang onto your money is to buy bargain books whenever possible. Sure, book clubs let you save upwards of 50% off the publisher's price of every title, but you can get even more discounts by browsing the virtual sale racks. (Here again, that nifty little club catalog comes in handy.) If you're looking to try out a new author or just build the kids a library of stories for bedtime, choosing from among the more economical titles will keep down your costs and help you fulfill your club commitment without breaking the bank.
- *Get club discounts from associated clubs* -- Lastly, if your club doesn't have what you're after, there's a good chance one of its sister clubs does. Just because you joined a mystery book club doesn't mean you have to pay full price to get classic Disney titles for the little ones' stockings. Many book clubs spoil their fans by giving them member discounts at clubs owned by the same company. Check with yours to find out if you've got access to the same sweet deal.

<http://www.book-clubs-resource.com/book-clubs/money-saving-tips.php>

Talk About It

Ice Breakers to Get You Started

Icebreakers are a great way to get to know new members or to mix up the usual book club meeting. Check out a few sample of the ice breakers listed below:

- ***Extreme Makeover***

Update a character or two from any book, especially if the action is set in an earlier era. Place the character in today's culture—and invent a life.

 - *Example:* Lydia Bennett (*Pride & Prejudice*) reads *Cosmo* (never *Vogue*; what's *Atlantic Monthly?*), hits the clubs at night, and wears cheap Manolo Blahnik knock-offs. Big hair. Thinks "Sex and the City" is serious drama and is always on the lookout for Mr. Big.
- ***Alphabet Soup***
 - Working around the room, each member names a character, event, place, or object from the book—the first letter of which starts with A, the next word starts with B, the next word C and so forth through Z. *Variation:* use the last letter of the previous word as the starting letter for the next word—a bit harder.
- ***Extend the End***
 - Jane Austen did it in *Pride and Prejudice*—she wrote an epilogue telling us how Elizabeth and Darcy fared after the story's last line. Take any novel (the current one) or several you've read over the past year and write an epilogue. What happens to those characters, say 1 year, 5 years, 10 years out? Divide up into teams, or go solo. Read the results out loud. Be as funny...romantic...or as serious as you want.
- ***Grab Bag of Props***
 - Fill a large shopping bag or box with objects from novels. Everyone pulls one out and guesses which novel (and author), which character, and at which point in the story (if relevant) the prop is used. Points are scored accordingly. Obvious examples: stuffed tiger for *Life of Pi*; camera for *Memory Keeper's Daughter*; sling shot for *Kite Runner*; a book by Russian author Nikolai Gogol for *The Namesake* (even better...an old overcoat!), and so on.
- ***Hollywood Bowl***
 - Cast a book as a movie. Pass around a bowl with folded slips of paper containing titles of recent book selections. Each member (or team of 2) draws a title and casts the movie. *Variation:* Each member (or team of 2) writes his/her casting choice for the current selection on a piece of paper. Take turns reading out everyone's choices.
- ***Literary Snowballs***
 - This is actually a lot of fun. Divide into 2 teams on either side of the room. Hand everyone an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper on which to write a question from the book. Crumple the sheets into "snowballs" and, at a signal, throw them across the room to the other team. The team who correctly answers the most snowball questions wins. (The question writer on the other team must agree to the answer.) Scoring: 2 points for answering the question; 1 point for posing a question the other team can't answer.
- ***Whose Line Is It Anyway?***
 - Chose someone to read quotes by or about various characters — from the current book or past book selections. Members try to guess who said what and when. If you want, divide into teams and keep score. (This icebreaker takes a bit of prep.)
<http://www.litlovers.com/icebreakers.htm>
- ***Pass The Hat***

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- This game is best in groups of about 10 people or less. Think up one or more questions per person (if the group is large have one question per person, if it's smaller have more). Cut the paper up so that each question is on its own little bit of paper, fold the papers up and put them in some sort of container.

Take it in turns to pull a question out of the hat and answer the question. Once somebody has answered his/her particular question, other people might want to share their own answers.

You'll probably want to set a time limit per question in order to keep things moving along - you don't have to announce this up front, just keep an eye on the time yourself and move things along if necessary.

- *Example Questions:*
 - What was the first book you remember reading/being read?
 - What is your favorite book of all time?
 - Which book has left the most lasting impression on you?
 - Which book have you read most frequently?
 - What books are on your bedside table at the moment?
 - Name one book/author that you really can't stand?
 - What type of books do you like reading most?
 - If you were given \$30 to spend on a book today, what book would you buy?
 - Where's your favorite place to read?
 - Which character in a book do you think is most like you?
 - Which character in a book would you most like to be?
 - What book do you plan to read next?
 - Which literary character would you most like to have a 'significant relationship' with?
- Important: The questions above assume that the group who are getting together already consider themselves relatively well read. However, if you're starting a group with people who may not think of themselves as "readers", you might want to consider more generic questions, such as favorite sport, favorite place to visit, person they most admire, etc. This game is intended to help people feel comfortable with each other, not embarrass them by asking questions they're not comfortable answering!

- *Wordplay*

- This is a game that you could use at a first meeting or just as a bit of fun at anytime. Thank you to Antoinette for sharing the idea with us!....

We play BookBrowse Wordplay at our book club at least once a month. I type out the "expressions" on index cards and pass them around to the members to guess the meanings. I pass around a grab bag of inexpensive little gifts to the winners and tell them to close their eyes and pull out a gift.

Antoinette Ciancarelli - 91 year old leader of "The Page Turners" in Medfield, Ma (a group of 8 spritly, sharp ladies ranging in age from 60 years and up.

- *Pair Share*

- If you think that some members of your reading group might feel uncomfortable coming up with a quick answer to a question in front of a group of people that they don't know well (as in *Pass The Hat*), arrange people in pairs (if there's one person left over, make a group of 3) making sure that, whenever possible, each person is with somebody they don't know. Give each pair a short list of questions (say 5-6 questions from the list above) and 5-10

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minutes to 'interview' each other. Have each person report back on what they found out about the other.

• Quiz

- This works best for groups of 8 or more. Give each person a copy of the quiz and a pencil; and about 15 minutes to find a person that fits each description, or knows the answer to the question. When the time is up, reconvene the group and have fun sharing the answers.

These questions are ones that I thought up in a few minutes on a Sunday afternoon - I'm sure you can do much better. Aim for about 10 to 20 questions. Use double spacing so that there's room to write down an answer.

For added interest, you could telephone each person in advance and ask them for one interesting fact about themselves - then incorporate these into the questionnaire - see below for examples:

This game can be tailored to virtually any gathering with almost any number of people - for example, a 40th birthday party quiz would ask questions about the birthday girl/boy (e.g. find somebody who can name her favorite color, knows the name of her elementary school, knows her favorite author etc.).

○ Example Quiz

▪ Find somebody who

- Has read a book of poetry in the last year.
- Likes to read in the bath
- Has fallen asleep with a book in their hands recently.
- Reads more than one book at a time.
- Likes to listen to audio books.
- Has been in a book group before.
- Has children.
- Has been married for more than 5 years.
- Will admit to being nervous to be here.
- Moved house in the past 2 years.
- Can quote at least 2 lines from Shakespeare.
- Knows the heroine's name in *Wuthering Heights*.
- Knows the name of one member of staff at the local library.
- Knows the name of Barbara Kingsolver's first book.
- Can recite a tongue twister (e.g. She sells sea shells on the sea shore.....).
- Drives a red car.

▪ Examples of questions specific to one group member. Obviously you need to create questions relevant to your members...

- Was born in South Africa.
- Plays saxophone in a local band.
- Has a dachshund named Lilly.
- Whose favorite book of all time is *The Phantom Tollbooth*.
- Etc, etc, etc!

• Name Walk

- This is a good game for helping people remember each other's names. It works best with about 6 or more people. The object is to say the name of a person across the circle before you move from your spot. After you've said a name, e.g. 'Jack', you walk to Jack's spot. Jack must say a name, 'Tasha', and move to Tasha's spot. Tasha's out if Jack gets to her spot before she calls out a new name.

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- *Human Twister*
 - Works best with about 10 people. Form a circle. The leader might say 'touch blue' and everybody touches that color on a fellow circle member. The leader then might say 'touch red and orange' and you must find red on one friend and orange on another. The leader then say 'touch black and white' etc. etc.
http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/ice_breakers

Questions Related to 'The Art of Racing in the Rain'

- Some early readers of the novel have observed that viewing the world through a dog's eyes makes for a greater appreciation of being human. Why do you think this is?
- Enzo's observations throughout the novel provide insight into his world view. For example:
 - a. *"The visible becomes inevitable."*
 - b. *"Understanding the truth is simple. Allowing oneself to experience it, is often terrifically difficult."*
 - c. *"No race has ever been won in the first corner; many races have been lost there"* How does his philosophy apply to real life?
- In the book's darkest moments, one of Zoe's stuffed animals -- the zebra -- comes to life and threatens him. What does the zebra symbolize?
- Can you imagine the novel being told from Denny's point of view? How would it make the story different?
- In the first chapter, Enzo says: *"It's what's inside that's important. The soul. And my soul is very human."* How does Enzo's situation--a human soul trapped in a dog's body--influence his opinions about what he sees around him? How do you feel about the ideas of reincarnation and karma as Enzo defines them?
- Do you find yourself looking at your own dog differently after reading this novel?
- In the book, we get glimpses into the mindset and mentality of a race car driver. What parallels can you think of between the art of racing and the art of living?
- The character of Ayrton Senna, as he is presented in the book, is heroic, almost a mythic figure. Why do you think this character resonates so strongly for Denny?

General Questions

Possible discussion questions for those times you get stumped.

- Was there a particularly striking scene in the novel? Share it with the group, and then discuss why and how it impacted each person.
- How did the setting affect the plot? Site examples.
- Was the story well developed, or were there any loopholes that made the book lose its interest?
- Did the author present the conflict of the book in a realistic context? Were the characters' struggles addressed in a believable way?

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- What motivated the story? Was the novel plot-driven or character-driven? Explain.
- What was the theme of the novel?
- What was your first impression of the characters and how did they (or did they not) evolve for you over the course of the novel?
- Were the characters believable? Site examples.
- Was the dialog convincing? Site examples.
- Was there a minor character that outshined a more central character? Explain.
- If you could meet any character from this book and ask him or her one question, which would it be and what would you ask? Why?
- What impression did the book leave on the group? Discuss.
- Share favorite passages of the book with the other group members.
- Would this novel make a good movie? Why or why not? Who should be cast as each of the main characters in the group's ideal version of the film?
- Would the group read more from this author? Why or why not?
http://book-clubs.suite101.com/article.cfm/general_book_club_questions_fiction#ixzz0rcoWR2bE
- Which character do you like the most and why? The least and why?
- What passage from the book stood out to you?
- Are there situations and/or characters you can identify with, if so how?
- Did you learn something you didn't know before?
- Do you feel as if your views on a subject have changed by reading this text?
- Have you had a life changing revelation from reading this text?
- What major emotion did the story evoke in you as a reader?
- At what point in the book did you decide if you liked it or not? What helped make this decision?
- Name your favorite thing overall about the book. Your least favorite?
- If you could change something about the book what would it be and why?
- Describe what you liked or disliked about the writer's style?
<http://www.book-club-queen.com/book-club-questions.html>
- What was unique about the setting of the book and how did it enhance or take away from the story?
- What specific themes did the author emphasize throughout the novel? What do you think he or she is trying to get across to the reader?
- Do the characters seem real and believable? Can you relate to their predicaments? To what extent do they remind you of yourself or someone you know?
- How do characters change or evolve throughout the course of the story? What events trigger such changes?
- In what ways do the events in the books reveal evidence of the author's world view?
- Did certain parts of the book make you uncomfortable? If so, why did you feel that way? Did this lead to a new understanding or awareness of some aspect of your life you might not have thought about before?
<http://www.book-clubs-resource.com/running/discussion-questions.php>
- Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
- Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of

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the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?

- Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
- Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
- What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
- Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
- Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
- Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?
http://readinggroupguides.com/no_guide/guide_fiction.asp
- Did you feel that the book fulfilled your expectations? Were you disappointed?
- Did the author seem to appear in the book? How? Why? Was the presence of the author disruptive? Or did it seem appropriate/fitting?
- Did you enjoy the book? Why? Why not?
- What about the plot? Did it pull you in; or did you feel you had to force yourself to read the book?
- How realistic was the characterization? Would you want to meet any of the characters? Did you like them? Hate them?
- Did the actions of the characters seem plausible? Why? Why not?
- If one (or more) of the characters made a choice that had moral implications, would you have made the same decision? Why? Why not?
- How does the setting figure into the book? Is the setting a character? Does it come to life? Did you feel you were experiencing the time and place in which the book was set?
- How would the book have been different if it had taken place in a different time or place?
- What are some of the book's themes? How important were they?
- How are the book's images symbolically significant? Do the images help to develop the plot, or help to define characters?
- Did the book end the way you expected?
- Would you recommend this book to other readers? To your close friend?
http://classiclit.about.com/od/bookclubs/a/aa_bcquestions.htm
- Overall—how did you experience the book while reading it? Were you immediately drawn into the story—or did it take a while? Did the book intrigue, amuse, disturb, alienate, or irritate, you?

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- Do you find the characters convincing? Are they believable? Compelling? Are they fully developed as complex, emotional human beings?
- Which characters do you admire or dislike? What are their primary characteristics?
- What motivates a given character's actions? Do you think those actions are justified or ethical?
- Do any characters grow or change during the course of the novel? If so, in what way?
- Who in this book would you most like to meet? What would you ask—or say?
- If you could insert yourself as character in the book, what role would you play?
- Is the plot well-developed? Is it believable? Do you feel manipulated along the way, or do events unfold naturally?
- Is the story plot or character driven? In other words, does the plot unfold quickly or focus more on characters' inner lives?
- Consider the ending. Did you expect it or were you surprised? Was it forced? Was it neatly wrapped up—too neatly? Or was it unresolved, ending on an ambiguous note?
- If you could rewrite the ending, would you? In other words, was the ending satisfying?
- Can you pick out a passage that strikes you as particularly profound or interesting—or perhaps something that sums up the central dilemma of the book?
- Does the book remind you of someone—a friend, family member, co-worker, boss—or something—an event, problem—in your own life?
- If you were to talk to the author, what would you want to know? (Many authors enjoy talking with book clubs. Contact the publisher to see if you can set up a phone chat.)
- Have you read the author's other books? Can you discern a similarity—in theme, writing style, structure—between them? Or are they completely different?
http://www.litlovers.com/questions_f.htm
- The circumstance that sets the book in motion is called the inciting moment. What was the inciting moment of this book?
- Describe the character development. Who did you identify with? Did your opinions about any of the characters change over the course of the novel?
- How does the author use language and imagery to bring the characters to life? Did the book's characters or style in any way remind you of another book?
- What do you believe is the message the author is trying to convey to the reader? What did you learn from this book? Was it educational in any way?
- Why do you think the author chose the title? Is there a significant meaning behind it?
- Is there a part of the novel you didn't understand? Are you confused by a character's actions or the outcome of an event?
- Do you think the setting, both time and location, played a large roll in this novel? Could it have happened anywhere, at anytime? If so, how would the novel have changed?
- In your opinion, is the book entertaining? Explain why or why not.
- What is your favorite passage?
<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/How-to-Start-Your-Own-Book-Club/print/1>

Create Your Own Questions: Helpful Tips

- **Read the Book:** Obviously reading the book is crucial to setting good questions. When reading the book keep a note pad and pen to hand and make a note of any issues that arise.
- **Take Notes:** Jot down the page number of anything that has you shocked, laughing, in tears, etc. This will help provide an important source of question material. Keep an eye out for features such as the following if you get stuck:
 - **Characters:** The characters and personalities in the book make good discussion material. The stronger the character the more there is to talk about. These needn't be the main characters, often the minor characters can make a meaningful contribution to the plot and warrant exploration further.

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- *Relationships*: How the characters in the book interact is an important part of the book and it is often the forming or breaking down of a relationship that moves the plot on in a book. These form a good basis for discussions, for instance, how did the break down of the relationship between X and Y alter the course of the book.
- *Location*: Discussing the importance of a particular location to the plot can lead to interesting discussions. Questions might include whether the story would work as well if the book was set in town A instead of city B.
- *Writing Style*: If the author used a different or unusual writing style then an interesting question would be how this influenced the understanding and enjoyment of the book. For instance, , did the fact that the author wrote the book using flashbacks add to your understanding or enjoyment of the book.
- *Overall Feelings About the Book*: After reading the book how do you feel? Are there any immediate thoughts that come to mind or scenes you keep replaying to yourself? Again, these immediate thoughts at the end of the book will indicate some of the important points in the story and will make interesting discussion. For instance if you are left wondering 'well how did that happen' or 'what happened to...', the chances are someone else will be thinking the same and interesting discussions can follow.
- *General Questions*: In addition to specific questions such as those above, some more general questions are useful to encourage discussion. These might include the very basic – what aspect of the book did you enjoy the most / least, or more specific questions such whether a particular event influenced the outcome of the book.

http://bestsellers.suite101.com/article.cfm/setting_book_club_questions

• Additional Triggers to Get You Thinking

- *Who are the key characters?*
 - Do one or more of the characters tell the story? If so, how do their own circumstances color the telling? Do you empathize with the characters? Are their voices genuine, are they believable? For example does a child narrator sound the age he/she should be? Does the voice of a character set in a particular place or time ring true? Are the characters or their circumstances familiar to you?
- *What style is it written in?*
 - Is it written in the first person, third person, or perhaps the second person, or perhaps a combination? Is the story told from one point of view or many? What genre is it? Is this a genre that you're familiar with? Does the book 'break the mold' in anyway.
- *What do the characters do?*
 - Do they react the way you think you would in a similar situation? Do you find their actions troubling? Are their actions consistent with their characters? If not, perhaps ask yourself if it is reasonable for anyone to be expected to act consistently in character! Do their experiences cause them to grow? If so, how?
- *What is the book about?*
 - Does the book have a central theme? If so what? Does it have many themes? If so how do they interlink? Is one theme more dominant than others? Do the themes blend naturally with the storyline or do you feel the author is using his/her characters to labor a particular point?
- *What time period is it set in?*
 - If it's set in a previous time period, is this a period you know anything about? Would you have liked to live in this period? What would be the advantages/disadvantages? If set in the future - do you think it's a credible view of the future? Is it one that you'd wish on future generations? If it's set in the current time, what current events, if any, color the story?

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- *When was the book written?*
 - If it's written recently, do you think it will date well or badly - will people still be reading it in 10 years, 50 years, a hundred years? If it was written sometime ago - does it feel like it's a product of its time? Is it a book that could be written now? If not, why not? What does it say about people's values at the time? Have they changed?
- *Where does it take place?*
 - Do the location and environment of the book color the telling of the story or are they merely a backdrop? Does the location change during the book or stay the same? If it changes, does this have any effect on the central characters?
- *What do you know about the author?*
 - Is the book autobiographical, has the author brought his/her own experience to the book, is it similar to other books the author has written, is it similar in style to other books by the author, and does the author show any growth/change in style between the books etc.
- *What did you like or dislike?*
 - Did you like the book or not? Did you enjoy it? Is it possible to find a book interesting without 'enjoying' it? If you didn't enjoy it what sort of person do you think would? Do you think you might have enjoyed it more or less if you'd read it when you were younger or perhaps waited to read it when you were older? Did you have expectations of it? If so did it live up to them? Had you read reviews before reading it? If so, do you find yourself agreeing with the 'official' reviewers or not? Do you think the book jacket synopsis and jacket illustration do a good job of indicating the type of book it? Would you give it as a gift? If so, who would you give it to? Can you see yourself reading it again? Is this book a 'keeper' - if you had to halve the size of your book collection would this be one of the books that stayed or went?!
- *How did the book affect you?*
 - Do you feel 'changed' in anyway? Did it expand your range of experience or challenge your assumptions (for example did it take you to a place you haven't been before or help you see a place you know in a different light). Did reading it help you to understand a person better - perhaps a friend or relative, or even yourself?
- *Project into the future*
 - What do you think will happen to the characters next? Does the author plan a sequel?
- *Compare and Contrast*
 - Contrast this book with others you have read, for example, books by the same author, with a similar theme, or set in the same time period. However, be careful to stay focused on the book in hand otherwise the majority of members may find themselves out of the loop listening to two members discussing the relative merits of books that the rest haven't read!
http://www.bookbrowse.com/bookclubs/advice/index.cfm/fuseaction/diy_guides
- Things to remember when creating questions:
 - *Keep them Interesting:* Boring questions will get boring answers
 - *Keep them Relevant:* Questions that are not relevant to the book just cause confusion. This is particularly important with books that are part of a series.
 - *Keep them Accessible:* Make sure the questions are easy to understand. People don't want to feel stupid because they don't understand what the questioner is alluding to.
 - *Keep them open-ended:* The purpose of a book club is to encourage free-flowing dialog between all the members. Questions should not simply have "yes" or "no" answers, but should promote the members to incorporate their personal insights and opinions to the book and the posed topic.

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- *Involve all the participants:* If forming personalized questions, why not ask each member of the club to come to the next meeting with a question or two. Not only will this formulate a wide variety of discussion points, but will also give each participant an opportunity to offer the rest of the group a chance to view the book in a different way.

http://bestsellers.suite101.com/article.cfm/setting_book_club_questions#ixzz0rcICEEFu

Spice It Up!

Activities for Book Clubs

Looking to do something with your book club besides just discussing the book? Check out these fun ideas to spark your imaginations!

- *Themed Meals:* Pair a meal to the setting or title of the story; it helps to enrich the book club experience. Make the evening easier for the host by planning the menu ahead of time and have everyone bring an item from the planned menu.
- *Play Dress Up:* dress up as your favorite character from the book
- *Games:* Search the web for fun, quick games related to book club. Here is an example, fill a large paper bag with objects found in well-known novels. Let guests pass around the bag and take turns removing items. Book club members must guess the novel, author and character related to the

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prop. Give members a point for each correct guess. Award a book as the prize to the member with the most correct guesses. Ideas include a small broomstick for the novel "Wicked" by Gregory Maguire or a book by Russian author Nikolai Gogol for the Jhumpa Lahiri novel "The Namesake."

- *Field Trips*: A trip to the movies for an adaptation of a recently discussed book or a visit a near by town, place or landmark that is represented in the book are just a couple of examples.
- *Community Service Projects*: Community Service Projects are great ways to give back to the community and get rid of some of those old books you aren't reading anymore! Here are a couple ideas for community service projects:
 - Plan a nostalgic evening in which members bring a copy of their favorite childhood book. Let members share the book and their memories of it with each other. Donate the children's books to a local school or library.
 - During a regularly scheduled book club evening, ask the group to volunteer at a local homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Inquire at the shelter about book requests or needs. If the shelter accepts book donations, ask members to bring a gently used book to donate to the shelter. During the next meeting, discuss a book about homelessness or poverty, such as David Shipler's "The Working Poor: Invisible in America" or "The Glass Castle: A Memoir" by Jeannette Walls.
http://www.ehow.com/list_5981063_activities-book-clubs.html
- *Still looking for ideas?* Visit <http://www.englishcompanion.com/assignments/reading/103readingactivities.htm> for a list of even more activities!

Appendix

Quick Reference Talking Guide

1. Does the book engage you?
Do you want to keep turning pages?

2. Why or why not?

3. Explore the following:

Style

- Does the author's **use of language** (diction and syntax) draw you in, or put you off?
- How would you **describe** the style: lyrical, pompous, complex and

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wordy, easy and straightforward, humorous, or offensive?

Character

- Are the characters **convincing**? Do they come alive for you? How would you describe them — as sympathetic, likeable, thoughtful, intelligent, innocent, naive, strong or weak? Something else?
- Do you **identify** with any characters? Are you able to look at events in the book through their eyes — even if you don't like or approve of them?
- Are characters **developed** psychologically and emotionally? Do you have access to their inner thoughts and motivations? Or do you know them mostly through dialogue and action?
- Do any characters **change or grow** by the end of the story? Do they come to view the world and their relationship to it differently?

Plot

- Does the plot **hold your interest**? Does it keep you turning pages? Does it move briskly or unfold slowly?
- What is the story's central **conflict**? Is it between characters, a character and society, a character and nature? Is it internal—an emotional struggle within the character? Does the conflict create tension, even suspense, to hold your interest?
- How is the story told— in **chronological** order? Or does the author play with time, veering back and forth between past and present?
- Is the plot **simple or complex**? Are there subplots related to the main plot—or separate, distinct story lines, operating independently and merging at the end?
- Were you **surprised** by the ending? Was information withheld till the end? Were there cliff-hangers at the end of chapters? Did that irritate you or make you want to read on?

Imaginative Development

- Can you think of the work's **themes**, or its larger meanings? What might the author be trying to get at, to say?
- **Symbols** intensify meaning. Can you identify any in the book— people, actions or objects that stand for something greater than themselves?
- Does the author use **irony**—a different outcome, or reality, than expected. Irony mimics real life: too often the opposite of what we want or intend happens.

<http://litlovers.com/howtoread.htm>