

# reading group guidelines



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every child a reader



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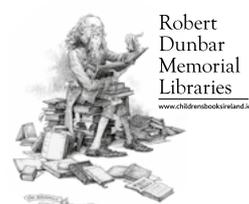
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## Starting Out

**AGE RANGE** – best to keep it reasonably narrow in order to find books to suit the reading abilities and interests of the whole group. (pre-school, 7–9, 8–10, 10–12 for example)

**FREQUENCY AND LENGTH** – monthly meetings allow for plenty of time to read each book and gives the facilitator ample time to prepare the discussion and activities for each session. How long the book club runs, depends on interest and venue availability. Bear in mind that a book will need to be chosen for each meeting.

**TIMING** – will depend on what best suits your group (weekday afternoon, Saturday morning, etc.) but, once a time is fixed, stick with it month on month, e.g. 4pm on the last Friday of every month.

**DURATION** – 40 mins–1 hour. If having hour-long meetings, it is a good idea to plan an activity as well as allowing time for discussion.

**NUMBER OF MEMBERS** – between eight and twelve. It helps to have even numbers if you're planning activities for pairs or teams. If the book club is very popular, you might need to start a waiting list so you can replace any drop-outs.

**LOCATION** – reading groups can adapt to any environment. Ideally, a private space with a table and chairs and space for arts and crafts. Wi-Fi is useful but not essential. It is possible to have fantastic reading group discussions sitting cross-legged on the floor, but knowing your space in advance will give an idea of what sort of activities you can plan for your group.

**HOW TO RECRUIT** – advertise through your library, bookshop, local schools, etc. Draw up simple posters and application forms – seek information on any medical issues you should be aware of, contact phone numbers for guardians and get parent/guardian/carer consent if you plan on taking any photos or video of your sessions for blog posts, etc. You should make yourself familiar with child-protection guidelines and check if you need to arrange Garda vetting for any of the facilitators involved.

**BUDGET** – assess the budget available for the project. If you're not drawing on library stock, you may need to factor in the cost of the books as well as arts and craft materials (e.g. paper, pencils, glue, scissors, etc.) for your activities.

## First meeting:

The first task is facilitating the children in getting to know each other. Use icebreaker games to get the children on their feet and engaged. For example, break the group into pairs for informal chat about their favourite books and authors and ask them to exchange book recommendations.

Use this session to set expectations for the term of the book club.

- Introduce the idea of keeping a reading journal and encourage members to keep track of what they're reading and what they think of each book they read.
- Introduce the first book/theme – the facilitator chooses this title to start things off.
- Give the club a name, brainstorm this with the group.

## Book selection:

There are lots of different methods to choose from. The method you chose should reflect what will work best for your group:

**Prescriptive** – Facilitator chooses all the books. This has the advantage that titles can be obtained and sessions planned well in advance of meetings. Sample discussion plans and activities are often available online on publishers websites for award winning or classic books. The disadvantage is that participants have no input into the selection so it is important to be mindful of the group you're choosing for. Several copies of each title are required which may be problematic if there are availability issues or budgetary constraints.

**Child-led** – Each participant has a turn to choose a book for the group to read. Some children may require guidance in choosing a title. This approach has the advantage of giving participants ownership of their club and the selection of books will reflect the interests of the children. As for the disadvantages, choices will require monitoring to ensure suitability, choices need to be made in advance to ensure there are enough copies available in time for session and budget or title availability can be an issue when trying to obtain multiple copies of each title.

**Popular vote** – The facilitator chooses two or three titles for the group to choose from. Majority determines selection.

This way, the facilitator can offer titles they feel are suitable for the group to choose from and may have read themselves previously. The facilitator can also offer titles that are available in the quantity required, while giving the children input and a degree of choice over what they read. The disadvantage is that this may require librarian to pre-emptively reserve multiple copies of a range of title per month which may have implications for title availability to borrowers/other branches, somewhat limits the freedom of choice of the young readers as the parameters are set by the facilitator.

**Thematic** – Each session is based around a theme/genre (war, animal stories, science fiction, mystery). Rather than everyone reading the same book, lots of thematically related books are read and discussed by the group.

One advantage is that multiple copies are not required – each child can choose their own book from a selection put together by the facilitator. Members will also have the chance to discover new books recommended by peers during sessions and reading in this way gives readers an awareness of how the theme relates to the story they're reading. The disadvantage is that each session not based on single text so plans need to be broad and general and the facilitator is unlikely to have read all books selected.

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## Session planning

Keep a notebook or some post-its handy while reading the selected books and make a note of any points that might generate discussion and ideas for group activities.

Rather than quizzing your group on the finer points of the text, use the session to encourage your readers to respond critically and creatively to what they've read.

Explore narrative by asking your group to consider whose point of view the story is told from, what impact this has on the story, and how the story might differ if it were told from another character's perspective. This is also a great jumping off point for creative writing exercises

Ask your group to think about what genre the book they've read might be classed as. Talk about the elements associated with the genre in question and whether these are present in the book they've read. Ask your group to think of other books that could be considered to be of the same genre and explore how book cover design conveys genre.

If the whole group has read the same book, explore the development of specific characters by discussing the challenges they face and how they are overcome. Examine the various themes and issues raised by the book and how they relate to the readers' own lives.

If working with illustrated texts, explore the role the pictures play in the telling of the story and in their own reading experience.

## Activity planning

The activities you plan will be contingent on the space and budget you have to work with. How you divide your session in terms of the ratio of discussion to activity time is entirely up to you and may vary from session to session depending on the amount of discussion a book generates or how long you expect the activity to take.

If you have the space and materials, arts and crafts sessions are an excellent way to encourage readers to respond creatively and artistically to a text. For example you could ask the bookclub members to design an alternative cover for the book, or design a poster to advertise the title.

Writing alternative endings, letters to authors/illustrators, diary entries for particular characters, creating maps of landscapes, redesigning book covers, inventing new characters, creating a storyboard or comic version of a favourite scene or chapter are all examples of written and illustrative activities you could try with your group.

Provide a selection of non-fiction or reference books from the library collection and have a research session to find out more about the time or place a book was set. Get into pairs and assign each a particular topic to research before reporting their findings back to the group.

Divide your group into teams or pairs and debate a topic raised in the book or perform a dramatisation of a particular scene.

Assign a character to a member of your group and ask them to sit in the 'hotseat'. The rest of the group asks the character questions about their thoughts and opinions on events or other characters in the story. Take turns with different group members playing different characters.

There might be a possibility of inviting authors and illustrators to visit the group to talk about their books and answer the children's questions. Authors and illustrators can be contacted in advance via their own websites or their publishers and asked to get involved. If you have Wi-Fi access, Zoom chats and Twitter Q&As with authors and illustrators are brilliant fun and give great insight into the creative process. You can also ask the bookclub members to submit their questions in advance, which you then relay via social media to the author or illustrator taking part.

## Notes

Encourage group members to keep a record of what they're reading in their reading journals. The journals can be used to document their response to what they read in their own time and this can be done through words, pictures, collage, etc. Some readers might like to share their reading journals with the group and others prefer to keep theirs private.

- Make a note of your group's response to each book you read – what did they like and not like and why?
- Make a note of how each discussion and activity went – what worked and what didn't and why?
- Help your group to make connections between the books they read by referring to previous books that explore similar themes, ideas, or are set during the same era, etc.
- Bear in mind that some topics might be sensitive for some bookclub members. Some books may require advance warning or discussion over phone or email with parents and guardians.

## Legacy

Ideally your bookclub will continue year on year, however, occasionally it might be appropriate to have a Christmas or summer party to mark the end of a year's worth of meetings. For example, the artistic work created by the bookclub members could be displayed gallery-style in a suitable space, with parents, guardians and family members invited to attend the launch and refreshments available.

Consider documenting the sessions via a blog, once you have guardian's permission for use of photographs. This will remain as a legacy for the project as well as giving interested parties an overview.