

School Library Pack 2016-17

A Guide to Running Reading Groups

Reading groups offer a vibrant way of bringing books to life, providing an invaluable snapshot of young people's reading tastes and interests. They can serve to boost confidence, vocabulary and public speaking skills and, if successfully embedded within the school, can form the backbone to its programme of reading for pleasure.

This guide has been put together to provide tried and tested suggestions and tips for starting a student reading group.

To find out more about the School Library Pack, visit our website:

www.booktrust.org.uk/programmes/secondary/school-library-pack

Setting up a new group

Who?

Decide who will attend the reading group. Will it be restricted by gender, age, book genre or to readers who are less keen or confident? Sometimes restrictions can help a group feel more exclusive, although in many cases a cross section of members leads to some of the most fascinating discussion!

Once you have established who it is aimed at, recruit members for the group. This could be done through notices in registration periods and assemblies, fliers in library books or by prominently displayed posters – giving young people the opportunity to design these as part of a competition can also be a good way of helping to spread the word.

Where?

Decide where your reading group will take place. The best settings tend to be informal spaces where members can feel comfortable and relaxed. Wherever it is, make sure there is ready access to a range of books – the school library is ideal, but if that is not available, look at having collections of books available with rotating stock.

Preparing for the first meeting

- Ask members to come prepared with a book they love or loathe – having the chance to talk about something they feel passionately about is a good way of breaking the ice and can help members to get to know one another.
- The first meeting is especially important in helping to establish the culture of the group. Having refreshments often proves popular and helps to make sessions feel informal.
- Prepare some simple book related games to aid discussions and help members begin to feel comfortable exchanging views in one another's company, for example:
 - 'Match the blurbs to the covers' – this can lead to lots of laughs if you carefully select book blurbs and covers.
 - 'Buy, Borrow, Bin or Burn' – come prepared with a list of newly published books, or a prize shortlist, and ask students to decide the books they love and would 'buy', those they are *quite* interested to read and would 'borrow', those they aren't

really interested in, which they would 'bin' and those which they feel sound awful and would 'burn'! Burning may sound extreme, but the opportunity to really vent their passionate likes and dislikes is a great way to get people involved and engaged. The idea behind it can also be tied to books like Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* in which book burnings take place, or discussions about censorship and banned books.

Making decisions

Try to give students as much input as possible into decisions so that they feel they have ownership of the group. Early on the group should decide:

- The best date and time to meet, to ensure maximum attendance for future sessions.
- How often to meet. You'll need to achieve a balance between leaving enough time to read the book, but not leaving such a big gap that the meeting is forgotten. Three to four weeks often works well.
- How to choose which book to read. It may be that the group:
 - Has a revolving choice with each member having the opportunity to give a suggestion for one of the meetings.
 - Decides to shadow a book award, reading the shortlist and choosing their own winner.
 - Sets up its own award by choosing a shortlist of books and then voting for their favourite.
 - Focuses on books in one genre or by a particular author, and coming together to discuss similarities, differences and what characterises that genre/author.
 - Uses reviews to keep up to date with what's new and might make good choices for the group.

Activities

Having a range of planned activities can support the group's growth and development. These might include:

- A visit by a public librarian to discuss new titles, popular authors for the age group and opportunities for the group at the public library.
- A visit by a local bookseller. This could include a sale of some new or classic titles. Maybe see if you can negotiate with the bookseller to arrange a small discount.
- A visit by an author, illustrator, poet or storyteller can really help to inspire group members and offer a new insight into reading and stories.
- Regular drop-in sessions by teachers who come prepared to give a five minute sound bite about a book they have read and loved.
- Look out for book adaptations at the cinema, the theatre, on television or the radio – looking at these alongside the book can be a good way of exploring different approaches to telling stories through various media.
- Shadow prizes - these could be local awards that public library services often run, or they could be national prizes like the Blue Peter Awards or the Carnegie Medal.
- Try to give the group a dedicated display board in the school library where reviews they've written, book covers they have designed and information about the group can be posted.
- Blind date book recommendations – books are wrapped in brown paper and have a common theme that the group try to guess.
- Take part in special focus events like Children's Book Week, Banned Book Week, and World Book Day.