

BOOK CLUB TIPS

Guidelines and Helpful Hints for a Library Sponsored Book Group

1. Logistics

- a. Day; time; and length of the meeting. Keep the same day and time.
- b. Create an appropriate atmosphere for the book group: meet in the library; sit around a table or put chairs into a circle. Decide whether to serve refreshments.
- c. Frequency of meetings – meet 4 -6 times from September to June. Give participants sufficient time to obtain and read the book (at least 4 weeks; 6 weeks is ideal).
- d. Don't meet during the High Holidays; Winter break; or Passover when everyone has other things on their mind.
- e. Have multiple copies of the title available in the library. Submit your selections to your local public library and request that they order additional copies.
- f. Announce the Book Selection: If possible, give a schedule of dates and titles for the entire year.
- g. Email meeting notice 6-8 weeks in advance of first session with the title and time of meeting. Include information in the weekly email announcement; Congregation bulletin; library email list; Facebook posts; and Shabbat announcements. Post information on a poster in the library, on a bulletin board; and/or print fliers. One month before the meeting send another notice and 1 week before send a reminder. At the session announce the date and title of the next book.

2. Book Selection:

- a. Select new or newer fiction (usually)
- b. Jewish Books (discuss definition of Jewish books at the first meeting)
- c. Fiction or memoir are usually the most successful genre.
- d. Either the leader or the group selects the titles. Facilitator makes the selections with input from the group or let the group vote between 2 or 3 titles.
- e. Select titles that stretch the mind and will provoke discussion (not necessarily a book everyone "likes")
- f. Select books that are under 400 pages (usually). If longer, allow extra time between sessions.
- g. Try a classic work of fiction and/or a children's or YA title once/year to add variety.

- h. Choose titles from different genres – historical fiction, contemporary fiction, Israeli fiction, Holocaust literature, short stories, memoirs, etc. Don't schedule more than one depressing or heavy book per year.

Hints for the Group Leader:

- a. Be sure you (as the leader) have carefully read the book. If you read it a while ago, review before the session.
- b. Have a written list of discussion questions, in case the conversation lags. I generally google the book title and download discussion questions.
- c. Read critical reviews of the book.
- d. Encourage participation from all. "Let's hear from some others" or "What was your reading experience" are good conversation starters. At the end of the discussion, ask everyone to rate the book on a scale of 1 to 10 to encourage everyone to share their opinion.
- e. Begin each session with a brief refresher of the plot and the names of the characters. You could also share excerpts from a book review.
- f. Provide background on the author and what else he/she has written. Create a "further reading" or "read-a-like" list of additional recommended titles. Display books during the meeting and invite participants to check them out.
- g. Keep the discussion lively and varied.
- h. There is no right or wrong answer in discussing a book. Everyone's opinion counts.
- i. Begin the session on time. Don't wait 20 minutes for the habitual latecomer. Treat the book group as a professional appointment.
- j. Think outside of the book. Add information from other sources. Share an audio or video clip from an interview with the author, for example, or invite the author to join you via Zoom or SKYPE.
- k. Ways to discuss books: as literature; as cultural view; story with a point of view; language; narrative voice; character development; plot development, author's intent; mood and setting.
- l. What to do about people who have not finished reading the book? Come anyway. Not everyone can finish every book, but everyone may still have something to contribute to the discussion. But – the discussion will not be limited. There should be a "no holes bared" discussion. Plot Spoilers are permitted.