

ARRT Book Club Study

March 8, 2023

Virtual

Meeting

Leadership Topic

Led by Jennifer Asimakopulos

Notes taken by Elizabeth Hopkins

17 participants

Best Practices for Selecting Book Club Books

When you're choosing books...is it lateral do you open it up to the group?

-We open it up to the group. I compile a list of various books and I ask them to pick 6 fiction and 6 non-fiction. They'll also do write-ins.

-Same. I give them a long list of 24 titles.

-I do have the power to veto decisions.

-I have a group that wants me to choose all the titles. It's hard because I'm a genre reader not a literary fiction person.

-I had an organizational meeting and I would bring a template. 6 books by men, 6 books by women.

-It's imperative to establish a line of communication. Invite patrons to email with suggestions. Not only titles but genres too.

I think one of the biggest benefits of book club is building community. Do you have any other requirements when looking to choose a book?

-Multiple formats

-Timely topics. We read *Caste* recently which my group loved. They want to read more about social inequality and social justice.

-I ran a 20s/30s group and they were the same way. They wanted to learn and we leaned into that.

Where do you look for your discussion picks?

-NovelList

-Penguin will occasionally drop a book club guide. I tend to make notes for potential discussion titles while I'm purchasing/selecting

- Reese's Book Club. I can't use it for a few months down the road. But an awful lot of those books are issue driven, and those are often satisfactory in my group.
- Goodreads. My struggle is that I have to offer large print. I have to get books from 2-3 years ago. And they don't always release the large print right away because they are waiting to see if the title will be popular enough for large print.
- It's a challenge for us because we're trying to get newer titles for our groups, but the hang up is that we can't get it in large print.
- Also the availability on e-book and e-audio. If they become comfortable enough using an e-book then the horizons broaden exponentially. I also keep a spreadsheet going of titles that I update when I'm ordering for the collection. Then I take that big list and I run it through Goodreads. If it's coming back with 2-3 stars then I'll say no thanks. But 3.5 stars and up I'll give it a chance.
- The prize winners. Booker Prize. *Small Things Like These* was a great discussion title.
- I love looking at the award list. Even genre books have their own awards.
- I try to always find books that have discussion questions. Why make it harder for yourself?
- Book Club Study was once Literary Book Discussion and that was so limiting.
- Penguin Random House Morning Book Buzz.
- My library has a cookbook discussion that's going really well. They pick one book and everyone makes one of the recipes.
- I've read some prize winners that I really did not like at all. There's prize winners and then there's good books. It matters more to me if the people are going to like it.

Are you looking at tone, genre, theme? We mentioned humor in this discussion title. So many book club books are deep or dark.

- The most important thing is if the book is discussable. You need enough meat to it.
- It's an important part of being that returning face each month, getting to know them and their reading tastes.
- You can figure out what your small community likes. I always feel badly if someone only pops in and out occasionally because they don't get that connection.
- I do 22 book clubs a year. I'm really getting to know the patrons and their reading paths. It's so helpful to foster that sense of community and establish buy-in.
- I do think it's important to welcome the one-timers. "If you don't know anyone, don't worry about it because you'll know me."
- And encourage people to just come whenever they're interested in a book. And if you don't want to talk, don't talk!
- I always tell folks that this isn't school. You don't have to participate, you can attend and just listen.

- "Shadow readers" patrons who read along with the group but don't participate.

What do you do with patrons with a very strong political point of view and want to express it?

- If it's a tangent... we have ground rules for our book club. One of them is we keep the discussion based on the book. We also have another rule that we don't make generalizations about a group of people. We also have another where folks can say "time out" if things are getting too heated.

- We're trying to keep the discussion to the book, so let's refocus...

Any sure bets or hidden gems?

- Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows by Balli Kaur Jaswal

- The Promise by Damon Galgut

- The Thursday Murder Club by Richard Osman

- Killers of a Certain Age by Deanna Raybourn

- This Tender Land by William Kent Krueger

- The Guncle by Steven Rowley

- A Short Philosophy of Birds (for groups that want something inspirational but not religious)

- The World's Strongest Librarian by Josh Hanagarne

- The 100 Years of Lenni and Margot by Marianne Cronin

- Wish You Were Here by Jodi Picoult

- Apeirogon by Colum McCann

- Homegoing by Yaa Gyasi

- The Reading List by Sarah Nisha Adams

- Bad Blood by John Carreyrou