

# Thinking of Starting a Book Club?

## Ideas for Your Book Club

No two book clubs are alike. Each has its own flavor, its own personality. There's no "right" way to run your book club. But these suggestions might give you some ideas to help your book club develop a unique life of its own, one that will enrich the lives of all its members.

### Why a book club?

This is the most important question to ask yourself, whether you already have a book club or you're just starting one. Why? The answer to this question will direct every other decision you make, from the people you invite to participate to the books you read. Is your goal to bond with the other members? Or do you have a particular theme in mind? Maybe you want to learn something new, or grow as a person? Determine your why, and make all of your other decisions based on that.

### What about structure?

Once you've determined why you're gathering, you can determine the bones of your club.

- Whom to invite: Do you want people of like minds, or diverse ages and perspectives? Will you follow a theme—politics, Jewish American experience, current affairs, historical literature, literary fiction, best sellers? Etc.
- How will you invite new members? This is a critical part of the process. When considering adding a new member, it's best to couch it in terms of an invitation to one meeting; this will avoid adding a permanent member who doesn't play well in the sandbox.
- Where to meet: Depending on your why, it may be appropriate to meet in a home, a library, or a synagogue. You could also vary the venue to tie into the book. This can inject a bit of excitement into the meetings.

- Of course, during these times, most people will ‘meet’ via video conferencing. This does open up some very interesting ideas, such as re-connecting with people from different parts of the country or even the world who otherwise wouldn’t be able to be part of your group.
- Hosting duties: Good food and drink are almost a must-have; virtually every culture has strong bonding rituals around food!
- Leadership: it’s critical to have one person lead the discussion. Otherwise, the group can go off in extraneous tangents that take away from the whole purpose of the meeting. The leader doesn’t have to be a police person; perhaps a better description is that of a crossing guard, who is able to gently hold her or his hands up to say ‘stop’ when someone’s venturing into irrelevancy.
- Balance social time and book discussion: Try to keep socializing down to just a few minutes at the outset; there’s plenty of time after the formal discussion for kibitzing. An hour of formal book discussion is typical, and can always be extended. Frequently, the after-discussion socializing time includes some additional observations about the book.

How about the books?

If the structure is the bones of your club, this is the meat. Your books need to answer your why. They need to engage your members and they need to inspire lively discussion.

Many times the publisher of the book offers discussion questions that you can find on the book’s website. Fig Tree Books always offer great questions to help draw out lively conversation. One important rule everyone needs to follow: Be kind and agree to disagree!

Three of our recent books have been the subject of numerous book club discussions. **The good news is that they are now all highly discounted as either print or e-books that work on all e-reader formats.**

- 1 Angela Himsel's *A River Could Be a Tree* offers a unique and surprising journey of self-discovery, courage, and spiritual awakening that can inspire some deep and inspiring soul-searching in your members.
- 2 In *Saving Free Speech...from Itself*, Thane Rosenbaum challenges readers to look not only at the intentions of the authors of the Constitution but also how free speech should properly be interpreted in a world that has broadened the meaning of "speech" beyond what the framers could possibly have imagined.
- 3 *My Mother's Son*, by David Hirshberg, is the winner of eight literary awards. It is a literary novel written as the fictitious memoir of a radio raconteur that uses the inconceivable events of his family's life and the world in which he lived as a foil to deal with major issues that affect Americans today—disease, war, politics, immigration and business. It has been purposefully set in earlier times so as to provide some distance from the current 'talking heads' climate that instantly categorizes and analyzes events from a narrow, partisan perspective.