

Books connect us: we rave about our favourites to anyone who will listen, pass on our well-thumbed copies to friends and get together in book clubs to chat through our opinions.

This beautiful guided journal will allow you to gather your thoughts on the books you have read, with 50 templates to fill in. You will also find advice on how to organize a successful book club, pick your discussion topics and make the most of your reading time, plus 200 book recommendations arranged into 20 themed reading lists, carefully curated by Sanne Vliegenthart, book reviewer and creator of hugely popular book videos at Booksandquills (184k followers on Youtube).

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book club journal

booksandquills



Contents

Books I've read 6

With space to list each book that you have read with a page number for your records

Introduction 8

GETTING STARTED 10

How to navigate the group

dynamics of your book club

How to read more (or, what to do if you're always running behind)

Some notes on taking notes

Doing the research (or not)

How to host a digital book club

Literary-themed snacks and drinks

MY BOOK CLUB READS 28

50 templates to record notes for and during book club discussions

THEMED READING LISTS 228

20 lists with 10 books per theme:

Classics Rewritten

Coming of Age

Memoirs

Out of This World

Life in the Big City

Book to Screen

Short Books for Busy Readers

Poetry

Imagining the Future

Diving into History

Murder, Mystery and Secret Societies

Exploring Nature

Revisiting Childhood Favourites

Feel-good Reads

Swooning and Romance

Grief and Break-ups

Books to Learn from and

Take Action

Classics to (Re)discover

Discussing the News Through

Fiction

Family Stories

Reading wishlist 254

Book loan tracker 255

Acknowledgements/credits 256

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Sanne Vliegthart

has been recommending books online since 2008, through her hugely popular Booksandquills videos. Born in the Netherlands, she works in London as a freelance social media producer and literary event host. Her videos about her favourite reads, university, publishing advice and author interviews, including with

Garth Nix and Malorie Blackman, have been viewed by over 15 million people. She loves combining her years of experience working for book publishers, including Penguin Random House UK, with her in-depth knowledge of the online reading world to create connections and inspire readers. Sanne's GoodReads account is the #11 most followed of all time in

the UK and she's been featured in *The Times*, *Cosmopolitan* and the *Guardian*.

Sanne's YouTube channel, Booksandquills, has 184k subscribers and 15 million views (with 35% of her following is in North America and 21% in the UK). She has 46k followers on Instagram and 26k on Twitter.

How to navigate the group dynamics of your book club

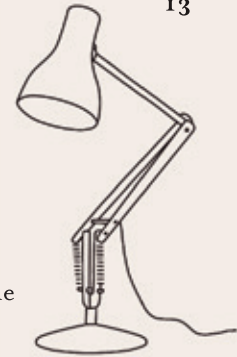
It's important to remember that no book club is the same, and there's a huge difference between creating a book club with a small group of close-knit friends versus joining one that consists of your colleagues or even total strangers. Each situation offers its own unique benefits and challenges.

The huge majority of group management boils down to the basics of making sure everyone feels comfortable and gets to share their thoughts in a safe and welcoming space. Of course there are opportunities to disagree, and for people to like or dislike the book you picked, but there are some things you should always keep in mind.

Deciding on the reading list

First of all, how do you decide which books are picked? When selecting your reads, definitely have a conversation about what the parameters are. Do you have any limits for book lengths or topics people might not feel comfortable with? Maybe you want to prioritize books you can get from the library or secondhand, to accommodate your group's budget. All of these are pretty important things to figure out beforehand, to avoid any awkward conversations when the books have been selected.

There are countless different ways to select your book. If you're letting everyone pick a book for one round individually, do remind the group (and yourself) that you want to keep the whole group in mind when picking. Your favourite 800-page sci-fi novel might not be everyone's cup of tea, so try to keep things accessible. If you want to make sure people are on board with your pick, maybe give them some comparison films or books that will get them excited (think *The Secret History* meets *Inception*!), share a moment from the book that really stuck with you when you first read it or the catchy review that made you want to pick it up in the first place.



If you're looking for a more democratic way of picking the books, why not have everyone put in three options for their choice and do an anonymous vote online? It can also be really fun to pick a theme for the month and choose titles around that. The options are endless, as long as you ensure that everyone is being heard.

How to deal with...

THE AWKWARD SILENCE

Most book clubs I've been to have started off a bit slow. This is the moment you can be extra grateful for the chatty person in the group. If you're leading the conversation, or even if you just have some topics you're keen to hear everyone's thoughts on, write them down in advance so you can whip them out and break that silence. Some great conversation starters include:

- Have you read this book before?
- Are you familiar with the author's other books?
- What were your impressions of the book before reading it?
- Which character or moment do you remember the most vividly?

THE ONE WHO DIDN'T FINISH THE BOOK

A few months back I organized a one-off book club where I invited online book lovers to meet up in a bookshop. The morning of the event I started getting message after message from people saying they hadn't finished the book and weren't going to attend because of it. I managed to convince almost all of them to come along in the end, and we had an amazing discussion! I've also sat through many English Literature lectures where it was very clear that half of the students hadn't finished their assigned reading (and often I was included in that group). But after nervously

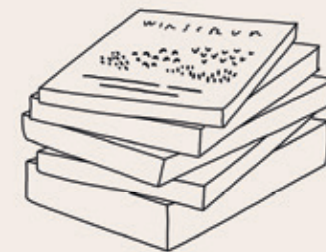
making it through the lecture, I would leave feeling more intrigued and motivated to finish the book.

Long story short, if not everyone finished the book, there's no need to panic! Encourage them to come along anyway, but make sure you figure out the guidelines of your conversation. It's frequently very doable to have an in-depth discussion of the majority of the book, without revealing the ending, if needed. Every reader will bring their own experiences to the discussion, from their own life, other books they've read and, of course, however much of the book club pick they did end up reading.

If you're thinking of skipping a week because you didn't finish the book, keep in mind that if you do attend, you might just leave having had a lovely conversation and with a newfound inspiration to continue reading (or at the very least you now know you can pass the book on to a friend and happily dive into the next read).

'Reading is my favourite occupation,
when I have leisure for it
and books to read'

— *Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey*



THE QUIET ONE

There will always be one or more participants of your book club who might not speak up as much. Make sure to check in with them to see if they'd like to be more vocal and if there's something in particular holding them back. Of course, if they're happy being a bit quieter, that might just work out fine with your group dynamics. It's worth adding in a few low-pressure moments where everyone can chat, even if it's just a round of asking people for their first impressions to kick off the conversation and make everyone feel comfortable.

THE ONE WHO HATED THE BOOK

It's inevitable that there will be a few books that one or more people in the group will dislike. While it can be fun to totally tear down a book, do stay considerate of the person who picked it, as they obviously put it forward for a particular reason. Try to incorporate a few questions around things that everyone might have learned from the book, or perhaps other books in this genre that they did appreciate. However, if it's clear that everyone's on the same page about not liking the book, just sit back and enjoy the lively discussion!

GOING TOTALLY OFF-TOPIC

Don't feel too pressured to rein in the conversation immediately if things start going off-topic, as you're all there to have a good time. But don't hesitate to bring it up if it becomes a continuous problem and you don't get around to discussing the book at all! Often a well-placed question, especially one that continues a point someone made a few minutes ago, can get the conversation right back on track.



TITLE:

AUTHOR:

Date started:

Date finished:

Paperback Hardback Ebook Audiobook

Number of pages:

Setting:

Book selected by:

Book club date:

Location:

First impressions:

Reaction/Thoughts right after finishing the book:

Themes:

Characters:

Notes and questions:

Pages to remember:

Final thoughts:

Rating:

Want to reread: Yes No Maybe

Further reading:

Favourite quote:

Longbourn*Jo Baker*

A new perspective on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, as told by the servants at Longbourn.

The Song of Achilles*Madeline Miller*

This time travel novella features a love story between two female agents who are each trying to fight for survival. But there is a war going on and if their relationship comes to light, it could mean the end for both of them.

The Deathless Girls*Kiran Millwood Hargrave*

The origin tale of Dracula's brides, which centres on the strong bond between twin sisters Kizzy and Lil, who are captured by the cruel Boyar Valcar.

Wide Sargasso Sea*Jean Rhys*

The mesmerising story of Antoinette Cosway shines a different light on the madwoman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

The Hours*Michael Cunningham*

Visit 1920s London, 1940s Los Angeles and 1990s New York and get lost in three stories that are all intertwined with Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

The Vegetarian*Han Kang*

When Yeong-hye decides to stop eating meat after a nightmare, she slowly becomes distanced from society. An intriguing three-part book with allusions to the story of Daphne and Apollo.

Home Fire*Kamila Shamsie*

A retelling of the Greek myth of Antigone, this book centres around the themes of family, loyalty and radicalisation.

The Other Bennet Sister*Janice Hadlow*

What would happen if Mary Bennet took a different path than what was laid out for her in *Pride and Prejudice*?

The Bear and the Nightingale*Katherine Arden*

The dark and magical tale of a young and rebellious girl in rural Russia, who is the only one in her town who can talk to the household spirits and is threatened by an ancient force.

Everything Under*Daisy Johnson*

When the past comes rushing back with a single phone call from her missing mother, Gretel has to face her old fears.

Turtles All the Way Down*John Green*

The touching story of Aza Holmes, featuring a fugitive billionaire, *Star Wars* fanfiction and a tuatara, with the ups and downs of friendship and mental health at the heart of it.

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*Jeanette Winterson*

Join a young girl as she comes to terms with her sexuality while living in a strictly religious environment. Funny, heart-breaking and totally unique.

Black Flamingo*Dean Atta*

A colourful and energetic verse novel featuring a mixed-race gay teen who is finding his place in the world.

Go Tell it on the Mountain*James Baldwin*

A 14-year-old boy's journey of discovering himself and his relationship with his family, church and the world around him, set in 1930s Harlem.

The Virgin Suicides*Jeffrey Eugenides*

Twenty years on, a group of boys share their memories of the mysterious Lux sisters in this poetic, dream-like and sometimes shocking novel.

The Miseducation of Cameron Post*Emily M. Danforth*

Cameron Post's vivid account of the loss of her parents, her first kiss with a girl during the blistering Montana summer and her forced move to a Christian conversion-therapy camp.

Jane Eyre*Charlotte Brontë*

A classic following an orphaned girl as she tries to find her place in the world and starts working as a governess at Thornfield Hall for the mysterious and brooding Mr. Rochester.

Loveless*Alice Oseman*

Georgia has never had a crush on anyone and isn't sure what that means. Then she's thrown into a brand-new world of university, roommates and friendship upheaval.

The Bluest Eye*Toni Morrison*

Toni Morrison's first, unforgettable novel, set in 1940s Ohio, tells the tragic story of a young black girl called Pecola Breedlove, during the years after the Great Depression.

Speak*Laurie R. King Anderson*

A heart-breaking classic of the genre, following funny, observant and friendless freshman Melinda, who's been alienated for calling the cops during a summer party.

I'll Be Gone in the Dark*Michelle McNamara*

A true-crime account of the Golden State Killer, who had California in his power for years. This book also finally gives a voice to his countless victims. Guaranteed to keep you up at night.

Lullaby*Leila Slimani*

A young Parisian couple think that they've found the perfect babysitter for their children, but the more they spend time together, the more the relationship sours.

My Sister, the Serial Killer*Oyinkan Braithwaite*

Sinister and funny, detailing the misadventures of two sisters, one of whom can't seem to help murdering her boyfriends. But when Ayoola moves on to the next boyfriend and starts dating Korede's crush, the situation gets even more complicated.

Through the Woods*Emily Carroll*

Five chilling short stories in graphic-novel form, inspired by fairy tales, folklore and the Gothic, with illustrations in stunning colours and terrifying characters.

Ninth House*Leigh Bardugo*

A book filled with secret societies, ghosts, power and magic, set in the dark hallways of Yale.

We've Always Lived in the Castle*Shirley Jackson*

Merricat lives with only her sister Constance and Uncle Julian, because the rest of her family is dead. People in the town whisper about what happened in their mansion, and the mystery starts to unfold when a visitor arrives.

The Secret History*Donna Tart*

This modern classic follows five students at a New England college, who slowly lose their touch with reality after a horrific chain of events. Dark and irresistibly compelling.

Gone Girl*Gillian Flynn*

What happened to beautiful, perfect Amy? When she disappears on her fifth wedding anniversary and her husband Nick is suspected to be involved, it's slowly revealed that nothing is as it seems.

Frankenstein*Mary Shelley*

Written in 1818, this classic will surprise any reader who thinks they know what they're in for. The Gothic tale of Victor Frankenstein who wants to create life and designs a creature who, after being rejected, sets out for revenge.

The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*Stuart Turton*

A mind-bending whodunit, with a character who keeps waking up in the body of a different guest at Blackheath Manor, where a murder has taken place.

The Overstory*Richard Powers*

Discover a ring of interconnected stories, covering a wide variety of time and locations, all relating to the natural world and the way people experience it.

The Salt Path*Raynor Winn*

A couple decides to walk 630 miles of the English coast after discovering the husband is terminally ill and losing everything they have. A story about grief, loss, nature and the meaning of home.

Where the Crawdads Sing*Delia Owens*

A heartbreaking coming-of-age story, set in a quiet town in Northern California and in the marsh where Kya Clark has lived by herself for years. Kya's life starts changing after a local is found dead and the police suspect her.

Entangled Life*Merlin Sheldrake*

An exploration of the weird and wonderful world of fungi, which are connected to many more things than we might expect.

Far from the Madding Crowd*Thomas Hardy*

When the young and independent Bathsheba Everdene starts her position as the farmer of a large estate, she quickly becomes surrounded by three suitors who in different ways affect her life and the community around her. Featuring gorgeous descriptions of rural life.

The Summer Book*Tove Jansson*

By the author of The Moomins books (see page 00), and inspired by some of her own experiences, this is the story of an artist and her young granddaughter who spend a summer together on a small island in Finland.

The Shepherd's Life*James Rebanks*

Coming from a long line of shepherds in the Lake District, James Rebanks describes the beauty and hardships of his work through the seasons.

Two Trees Make a Forest*Jessica J Lee*

Jessica J Lee starts a journey through Taiwan to discover the history of her family, who moved from China, to Taiwan and then to Canada.

The Grassling*Elizabeth-Jane Burnett*

A celebration and exploration of our roots and how the land shapes us, in the wake of the author's father declining health and his connection to a small village in Devon.

Underland*Robert Macfarlane*

Dive into the surface of our planet, as Robert Macfarlane explores the Earth's underworlds through literature, memory and nature.