

Books Build Community

Book clubs focus on coming together, to create new understanding, and help people explore their dreams and goals. For young people especially, books can help speak directly to their lives in a way that direct instruction from adults simply cannot. When people connect to books, they connect to humanity, and through stories, young people can explore aspects of life they may never experience first-hand.

While all book groups focus on connecting readers with literature, book clubs for younger people have the additional benefit of being an important way to connect kids to other kids – building community through books. Through a book club, participants can not only explore the topic book itself, but the structured nature of a club brings a leadership dimension that many young people might otherwise not get to explore.

Kids may start merely as readers, but ultimately the goal is larger: to become passionate participants who eventually grow into leaders, and to build connections between young people, especially in a time when distance is more important than ever.

This document is a starting point for adults to help promote, facilitate, and help maintain a book club for young people in whatever form it takes. It's not a 'one-size-fits-all' style cookbook, but a guide that you may expand on or alter to suit the needs of your individual group.

Steps to Building and Running a Virtual Book Club

Successfully hosting a book club or book group isn't always as easy as choosing a book and saying, "Let's discuss!" Here are a few tips to help you start and grow your community of readers. This document focuses mainly on groups of younger readers, but many of these tips apply to book lovers of all ages!

Invite your group

Cast your net wide! Invite your core group, and encourage them to bring a friend. Make it clear to your participants that the group is open to anyone who enjoys stories and who wants a fun way to connect with other readers.

Need some ideas to help fill out your young readers group? Here are a few ideas to help you grow your membership:

- If you have children of your own who will participate in the group, ask them to invite their friends.
- Reach out to your child's teacher or librarian and let them know you're hosting a group and looking for participants. They may be willing to share in an email to families or via a newsletter.
- Use your social channels to let your friends and audience members know about the group.
- If you're in any parent groups on Facebook, post about your group there and invite kids to be a part of it.

Set the meeting date and time

Holding your meetings virtually can mean greater flexibility on the part of participants, but it can also mean more distractions. Especially in a group for younger readers, working around school, extracurricular, and vacation schedules can be a challenge, but do your best!

Start the discussion

In a new group of young people, it can be tough to get authentic discussion started. Many book groups start with a structured element, where everyone takes turns sharing their thoughts. Consider starting your discussion with a specific question about the book that everyone can contribute to, e.g. "*What was the most memorable scene in the book for you?*" or "*Which character did you relate to the most?*" If your readers are comfortable reading aloud, you can also ask them to take turns opening the session by reading their favorite passages from the book.

Direct the conversation

Use a few prepared questions as your agenda, but be flexible and allow readers to lead the discussion. Even as you ask prepared questions, give your readers plenty of latitude to cover ground they want to cover.

Give equal attention to everyone

Avoid the temptation to allow a handful of voices to dominate the discussion. Notice which voices dominate and which ones get squeezed out, and consider actively engaging the more quiet participants.

If you notice some members consistently left out, you may think about designating someone to start the conversation off each week. Connect with them outside of the group and let them know which question you'd like them to lead with so they can prepare in advance.

Balance 'book talk' and personal talk

Book discussions often lead naturally into topics that relate to our daily lives. A good book group facilitator knows how to balance personal discussion and on-topic chat. It's absolutely fine, and even expected, for the conversation to linger on shared experiences outside the book. However, don't allow your meetings to become a free-for-all, and be sure to direct the conversation back to the book if things stray too far off track

Handle friendly disagreements

Everyone has the right to their own opinion, and everyone has the right to disagree with it. No one has the right to attack another person, or what that person thinks or feels. If discussions get heated, a good facilitator should remind participants there's no right or wrong way to feel about a book.

If you notice your group often strongly disagrees or you have issues with members talking over one another, think about managing the conversation by controlling who has the floor. With Zoom, as the group host you can control who is able to speak by muting and unmuting participants. Put everyone on mute and ask those who'd like to speak to notify you via the chat option. Then, you can welcome them into the conversation at appropriate times.

Expand the learning

With many students across the country participating in virtual school this fall, your book club members may be eager to take some of their book club offline. There are a number of projects and activities you can encourage your club members to do outside of your meetings. If your group is reading a book from The Merlin Saga, consider suggesting activities like building their own wizard staff or creating their own map of Fincayra. You can suggest a weekly extension or have a long term project they can do over the course of reading the book. It may also be fun to have a presentation day where your participants get to take the floor (or the screen in this case) and share their creations with the group.

A Quick Guide to Using Zoom

There are a wealth of options for holding virtual meetings these days. You can use any virtual platform you are comfortable on, of course, but one popular option is the free version of Zoom, which currently allows you host meetings of up to 40 minutes, and has a relatively simple-to-use interface.

Below you will find a quick start guide to help you get up and running. We've also included some tips and tricks and solutions to common problems user run into.

Step 1: Setup

The first step in creating a virtual meeting is to [set up your Zoom account](#), if you don't already have one. Once you're all set up, go ahead and sign into your account, and be sure to update your profile with some basic info and a photo. Now you're ready to schedule your first meeting!

Scheduling a virtual meeting is as simple as clicking "Schedule a meeting" and adding your participants to the meeting. You will need their email addresses in order to send them an invitation to participate. Include the topic, date and time, and correct time zone in your invitation to ensure your participants know when your meeting is going to happen

Zoom offers the option to set a meeting password in order to make sure your group isn't interrupted by uninvited guests. To set a password, click on the drop down arrow for *Advanced Options* toward the bottom of the screen, then select *Require Meeting Password*. Set your password using the posted requirements. The password will be provided to participants when you share the link or invite them to your meeting.

- Advanced Options is also where you can elect to record your meeting. To do so, simply check the box that says "Record the meeting automatically". You then choose how to save your recording — either to your computer, or via Zoom with the cloud. You can stop and start recording the meeting at any point once your meeting has begun, but pre-selecting this option will just ensure it's recorded in case you forget to press start on the big day.

Step 2: Hosting

On the day of your first meeting, plan to log onto your computer or enter your Zoom app a little early to get ready. You will need to make sure you've downloaded the Zoom client to your computer or added the app to your phone before starting.

When it's nearly time to start the meeting, go to the Meetings tab in Zoom. You will see a list of all of the meetings you have scheduled under the "Upcoming Meetings" tab. Locate the meeting you'd like to start and simply click "Start". Zoom will launch automatically and your meeting will begin. Now you're ready for your virtual guests to arrive!

Tips, Tricks and Common Problems

- You can't hear anyone or they can't hear you
 - Make sure you and all of the participants have their audio unmuted. Also, ask everyone to check that their volume is turned up.
- You can't see anyone or they can't see you
 - Make sure you and all of the participants have their cameras enabled.
- The audio is bad and it keeps breaking up
 - The Internet connection may be weak. Consider calling into the meeting via the phone. Zoom will provide numbers for users to join the meeting using phone audio.
 - If you do this, be sure to switch your Zoom meeting from computer audio to dial in audio to prevent an echo or other interference while talking.
- If you want to share your screen
 - Use the Zoom menu to share your screen with your participants. You can elect to keep video open or turn it off while doing this using the on-screen Zoom menu.
- If you want to add a cool custom background image
 - [Here are a few you might love!](#) To add one to your background, use the guide found here: [How to Change Your Zoom Background](#)

If you're having other issues running your meeting on Zoom, here are a few online guides you may find helpful.

- [Getting Started with Zoom for Students](#)
- [Advanced Zoom Tips for Better Video Meetings](#)
- [The Complete Zoom Guide](#)