

A Few Tips for Book Group Discussion Leaders

These tips are optional – select and use the ones you like!

Opening a book discussion:

- Introduce the author before getting to the book—give a short biography
Mention other books written by this author if relevant
Note awards, prizes, recognition (quote statements made about this author by reviewers, etc.)
- Set the context—
Many people read the book weeks before the discussion. To refresh them, give a short overall sketch of the book, what it is about, what happens
If there is something memorable about the setting (time or place), note it
- Share your personal viewpoint—
You can say something about what drew you to the book and what made you suggest it for the book group.

General discussion themes:

- the characters (if fiction) – their problems/decisions/relationships, believability; do readers identify with any particular character?
If this is a non-fiction book, a similar discussion can be had about the people in the book
- the book's structure – narrative devices, such as flashbacks or multiple voices
- in whose voice is the story/narrative told
- the cultural context of the book and how that affects the reader's understanding
- the author's language and writing style – poetic, vernacular, appropriate to the story, any unusual qualities—irony, humor, use of symbols
- the plot (if fiction) – believable, memorable, suspenseful, effective
- transformation and change within the characters/people in the book
- the major themes of the book – does the author sufficiently support the book's ideas?
- strengths and weaknesses of the book
- the book's ending – satisfying, unresolved, surprising, well-crafted
Does the author offer solutions, or make a call to action to readers?
- the “take-aways” from the book as experienced by readers. Is this a book that changes and/or educates the reader?

Considerations for the discussion leader:

- NOTE: if the leader has noted on a few significant passages in the book, these can be read during relevant times during the discussion to solicit others' reactions
- ask questions that allow for maximum participation
- listen carefully
- keep the discussion on the book, not too far into someone's personal experiences
- keep a balance in the discussion between allowing people to pursue the things that engage and interest them vs. moving to other topics