Tips for Leading a Book Discussion Group
Prepared by the reference staff of the Franklin Township Public Library

Before the Meeting

- Plan to read the book far enough in advance of the meeting to give yourself some time for reflection about what you’ve read.
- As you read, write down important page numbers for passages in the book that really had an impact on you or that you would like to discuss with the group. Use bookmarks with short phrases or notes to help you recall what you wanted to discuss.
- Read through the discussion questions provided in your Book Club in a Bag kit, and/or develop some questions of your own.
- Choose a variety of books from different genres and encourage others to read outside their comfort zones. Often the best discussions come from books readers would not have chosen themselves!

Leading the Discussion

- Allow time at the start of the meeting for everyone to say hello and get their socializing done. Unless the group is familiar with each other, have everyone introduce themselves. Use an icebreaker activity (especially one related to the book) if you think it will encourage discussion.
- Briefly ask each member for their opinion on the book. This will give everyone a chance to speak and can help determine where the discussion will lead and which questions may be of particular interest.
- Do background research and bring handouts such as an author bio, interview with the author or any historical information pertaining to events in the book.
- Decide ahead of time which points you really want to cover. Have several topics and questions in mind to keep the conversation on track and moving.
- Avoid asking questions that have yes or no answers.
- You may need to play devil’s advocate and present an opposing view to keep the discussion interesting; bring professional reviews.
- When you pose questions to the group, make sure you let others answer first. If you find one person to be dominating the conversation, try a phrase like “what does everyone else think?” Facilitate the discussion so everyone feels their voice is heard.
- Respect everyone’s opinion. Not everyone will like the book. Make sure the discussion remains non-judgmental.
 Allow everyone to share their personal stories but steer the conversation back to the book if the discussion is too far off track.

 Don’t worry about sticking to the questions in order. Allow for members to make their own connections between the book’s themes.

 If everyone seems happy discussing one particular aspect of the book, feel free to stay on that topic for as long as everyone remains happy discussing it.

Developing Questions
Source: [www.bookbrowse.com](http://www.bookbrowse.com)

Here are a few general questions to help get started. Look for any ready-made discussion guides (often created by the publisher) that are tailored to a specific title.

- **Who are the key characters?**
  Do one or more of the characters tell the story? If so, how do their own circumstances color the telling? Do you empathize with the characters? Are their voices genuine, are they believable? For example does a child narrator sound the age he/she should be? Does the voice of a character set in a particular place or time ring true? Are the characters or their circumstances familiar to you?

- **What style is it written in?**
  What voice is the story written in - the first person (I, we), third person (he, she), or rarely in the second person (you)? How does this perspective color the story? If the story is told from multiple viewpoints, how do these different perspectives influence your perception? Is the book told from one point of view or many? Is this a genre that you're familiar with? Does the book 'break the mold' in any way.

- **What do the characters do?**
  Are their actions consistent with their characters? If not, perhaps ask yourself if it is reasonable for anyone to be expected to act consistently in character? Do you find their actions troubling? How would you act in a similar situation? Do their experiences cause them to grow? If so, how?

- **What is the book about?**
  Does the book have a central theme? If so what? Does it have many themes? If so how do they interlink? Is one theme more dominant than others? Do the themes blend naturally with the storyline or do you feel the author is using his/her characters to labor a particular point?

- **What time period is it set in?**
  If it's set in the past, is this a period you know anything about? Would you have liked to live in this time? What would be the advantages/disadvantages? If set in the future - do you think it's a credible view of the future? Is it one that you'd wish on future generations? If it's set in the current time, what current events, if any, color the story?
- **When was the book written?**
  If it's written recently, do you think it will date well or badly - will people still be reading it in 10 years, 50 years, a hundred years? If it was written sometime ago - does it feel like it's a product of its time? Is it a book that could be written now? If not, why not? What does it say about people's values at the time? Have they changed?

- **Where does it take place?**
  Do the location and environment of the book color the telling of the story or are they merely a backdrop? Does the location change during the book or stay the same? If it changes, does this have any effect on the central characters?

- **What do you know about the author?**
  Is the book autobiographical, has the author brought his/her own experience to the book, is it similar to other books the author has written, is it similar in style to other books by the author, and does the author show any growth/change in style between books?

- **What did you like or dislike?**
  Did you like the book or not? Did you enjoy it? Is it possible to find a book interesting without 'enjoying' it? If you didn't like it, why not, what sort of person do you think would? Do you think you might have enjoyed it more or less if you'd read it when you were younger or perhaps waited to read it when you were older? Did you have expectations of it? If so did it live up to them? Had you read reviews before reading it? If so, do you find yourself agreeing with the 'official' reviewers or not? Do you think the book jacket synopsis and jacket illustration do a good job of indicating the type of book it is? Would you give it as a gift? If so, who would you give it to? Can you see yourself reading it again? Is this book a 'keeper' - if you had to halve the size of your book collection would this be one of the books that stayed or went?

- **How did the book affect you?**
  Do you feel 'changed' in anyway? Did it expand your range of experience or challenge your assumptions (for example did it take you to a place you haven't been before or help you see a place you know in a different light?) Did reading it help you to understand a person better, or even yourself?

- **Project into the future**
  What do you think will happen to the characters next? Does the author plan a sequel? Would you read a sequel?

- **Compare and Contrast**
  Have you read other similar books? Perhaps books by the same author or with a similar theme, or set in the same time period? (Be careful with this topic not to stray too far into other books, otherwise the majority of the group may find themselves out of the loop listening to a small number of discussing the relative merits of books that the rest haven't read.
Book Club Resources:

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