

How to Organize an Extension Homemaker Book Club

Book clubs or book groups are more popular than ever. Most public libraries have book groups that meet at various times of the day or month to discuss popular, new books. There are radio or Internet based book clubs, church book clubs, mother/daughter book groups, couples' book clubs or book clubs just for women under 40 years old. Even John Calipari, University of Kentucky basketball coach, now has a book club affiliated with the Lexington Public Library. Everyone should remember Oprah's Book Club; in fact, many people believe her book club began the increased interest in reading and discussing books.

Book clubs are a great way to meet new friends or get together with current friends to explore and discuss books you may not have selected on your own. Belonging to a book club will help you stay motivated to read and help you to read different types of books.

Maybe it is time to start a book club affiliated with your county Homemaker organization. Get together with some local friends who are also interested in starting a Homemaker Book Club. Allow the group to make most of the decisions. You can do this at your first meeting. Here are some tips to get your club started and keep it going.

1. **Decide the criteria for membership.** Do members need to belong to a regular Homemaker Club and pay county Homemaker dues through that club? Will book club members, not in a regular Homemaker Club, be required to join as a county Mailbox member? Will anyone be allowed to join the Homemaker book club, even if they are not members of other Homemaker clubs, without the payment of county Homemaker dues? Allowing Homemaker nonmembers to belong for a specified time may be a good way to recruit new members to the Homemaker book club and to the overall county organization too.
2. **Will you limit the size of the club?** There is no ideal size for a book club. Depending on the age of the members and other job and family related responsibilities, many members will not be able to attend every month. Some clubs with larger memberships may have only half that membership at each monthly meeting. Be sure the size of the club will allow members an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. If your club is smaller, bringing guests is a good way to build membership.
3. **Decide where and when the Homemaker Book Club will meet.** For the initial meeting you may want to meet at the Extension office, public library or other community center. If your membership is from a specific area of the county or subdivision, you may want to meet in a nearby church or in members' homes. Some clubs meet in restaurants where each person will purchase their own food and beverages. You may want to alternate your book club meetings between a public meeting space and members' homes. This should be the decision of the club members. The size of your meeting space may limit the number of members your club will accommodate.
4. **Decide on the day and time the Homemaker Book Club will meet.** How often will the club meet? Most clubs meet at least once a month, but you could meet more often.

Will you meet every month? Some groups meet only during the months when school is in session (September – May). **Will your group meet in the evening or during the day?** If most of the membership works during the day, it may be better to meet at night. On the other hand, if the membership is mostly retired, they may prefer to meet during the day.

5. **Decide if refreshments will be served.** How will this responsibility rotate to ensure that everyone helps? Will your meetings be potluck with everyone bringing a dish? Refreshments are important, but try to avoid having members who try to “outdo” others by preparing elaborate refreshments. Make sure everyone knows what is expected without going overboard.
It is often fun to connect the food to the book your group is reading. For example, if you are reading *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck, you may want to prepare food inspired by the book, or at the very least Chinese food. If the members are reading a book about Italy, the group may want to meet at local Italian restaurant.
6. **Will the club have other rules?** What will be the club policy on cell phone use at the meeting, bringing children (or pets) or smoking? Some people will not mind if members bring their children, others will. The character of the meeting will be very different if children are present. Will members be allowed to bring guests? Does the group have a need for money? Will there be funds for mailing, paying for meeting space or other needs. The book club may need to charge dues or have another way to earn money just for the book club. Some clubs ask for donations at meetings to buy stamps or for other small monetary items. Clubs often use email, Facebook or other online resources to keep costs of mailing and communicating with other members to a minimum.
7. **Decide on a name for the club.** It may be as simple as the Wildcat County Homemakers Book Club. Other names may be based on the names of authors, such as the Jane Austin Book Club. A name is important. Don’t just hurriedly select a name; make sure everyone has the opportunity to suggest ideas.
8. **What type of books will the club read?** A good guide for book selection might start with books in the Homemaker Book List. The books on this list are divided into 9 categories. (Homemaker members who read at least one book from 6 of the 9 categories may be eligible for the Cultural Arts Reading Award Bookmark recognition at the county level.) Generally these are newer books, published within the past 3 years. Will your club focus on only one book theme or genre? Will you limit books based on content? Are there topics that the group agrees to avoid such as books about religion, politics, strong language or sex. Some clubs base their selections on books from other book club selections, such as Oprah’s Book Club. Some clubs have a committee that selects books for the entire group. Always keep the interests of the members in mind. Be sure to consider the cost of purchasing the books. You may want to wait until the book is available in paperback. Consider working with your local librarian who may be able to get some of the books through interlibrary loan. Check on the cost of ordering books through a local or online bookstore. Be sure to ask if discounts are available for multiple copies of the same book.
9. **Decide on the first book the group will read.** There are several ways to decide on the first book that the group will read. You can pick a book yourself and bring it to the

meeting or you can ask several potential members to bring books for consideration. Be sure you have information about the books such as reviews and how to obtain the book. You will want to check with your local librarian to see if multiple copies of the book are available via interlibrary loan. Check on the cost of ordering books through a local or online bookstore. Be sure to ask if discounts are available for multiple copies of the same book. Check with publishers. Some maintain lists of book clubs and often send clubs free books.

10. **Choosing books to read each month.** Some clubs select books for the entire year at the first meeting of the year. Some clubs select titles quarterly. Others pick their next book at each meeting. It is good to choose a book at least 2 or 3 months ahead of the month it will be discussed. This will give all members plenty of time to purchase the book and read it before the book club discussion. Will you limit your selections to books available on-line or to paperback books? Encourage everyone to share their ideas for books. One part of the agenda each month might be to have members report on ideas for book club selections. The club can make selections any number of ways — take turns (alphabetically or by birthdays, whatever your group decides); take a blind vote on each proposed book; put all possibilities in a jar and pull out the “winner”; or just designate someone to select books for the entire group.
11. **Who will be responsible for purchasing books for the club?** Will each individual member get their own book? Some clubs have one person in charge of purchasing books for the entire group. The club may want to require payment in advance before books are ordered to avoid one person having money invested in the books and to avoid ordering more books than are purchased by members. Books should be ready for pick up at least one or two months ahead of when the book will be discussed.
12. **Make the club fun and something members enjoy attending.** Plan special activities for months you may not meet for book discussion. For example plan dinner at a special restaurant in December or a family picnic sometime during the summer. Plan a book swap or a book auction at regular meetings. Book auctions are a good way to raise money for your club. For Halloween have members dress up like their favorite book character. Have club members guess who they are.
13. **Avoid over managing the club.** After the first meeting, let the club run itself as much as possible. Some of the best book groups are those where members know their responsibilities and follow through when needed. Some clubs need someone to serve as the group leader. This person will assume many of the responsibilities for communication and direction that might be assumed monthly by the hostess.

TO DO BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING:

1. Decide on a date, time and place for the first meeting.
2. Publicize the first meeting. Ask your Extension Agent to mention the Book Club meeting in the Homemaker or FCS newsletter. Consider preparing flyers and distributing them at grocery stores, churches or on community bulletin boards. Put a notice in the local newspaper. Contact potential members via email and telephone. Put meeting announcements on Facebook or Twitter.
3. Prepare the meeting space. Prepare refreshments. Be sure there are enough chairs and refreshments for all you expect to attend.
4. If members of the group do not know each other, have nametags and ask everyone to wear them during the meeting.
5. Ask one of the co-organizers to take notes during the initial meeting.

TO DO DURING THE FIRST MEETING:

1. Greet each potential member at the door. Introduce yourself and make each guest feel welcome and comfortable.
2. Start the initial meeting by stating the purpose of the meeting.
3. Go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves. You might ask them to mention their favorite book or the title of the last book they read. Ask each person to tell a little about their reading interests, hobbies and other interests.
4. Talk about issues regarding membership. Be sure all members have an opportunity to participate in the discussion.
5. Be sure members understand their responsibilities to the club. (see tips 1 and 2)
6. Decide where and when your club will meet. (see tips 3 and 4)
7. Will your club serve refreshments or other food? (see tip 5)
8. Consider other rules. (see tip 6)
9. Decide on a name for your club. (see tip 7)
10. Do you need officers? Many book groups have only hosts and discussion leaders each month. Other clubs have a group leader who assumes responsibility for organization and communication for the club. If you will have money, you will need a treasurer.
11. Decide the type of books your club will read. (see tip 8)
12. Select a book to discuss at the next meeting. (see tip 9)
13. Select books to discuss at future meetings.
14. Pass around a signup sheet that includes the books selected for each month. Members should sign up for discussion leader for the books that interest them.
15. Pass around a signup sheet for hosting. (includes preparing refreshments and meeting space)
16. Remind members of the date, time and place of the next meeting. Remind the host and discussion leader for the next meeting. Remind members to purchase and read the book club selection for the next meeting.
17. Enjoy refreshments. Let members linger and talk over refreshments or leave as they want.

Suggested Agenda for a Homemaker Book Club Meeting

- **Welcome - Hostess**
 - Make all members and guests feel welcome
 - Share information about rest rooms, parking, where to place your coat and other important information
- **Introductions – Hostess and Members**
 - Members should introduce their guests
 - Have members include something short and interesting, such as vacation plans, accomplishments of children or grandchildren, a new household project
 - Pass around a sheet for members to sign or have someone keep a list of who is present at each meeting
- **Announcements - Hostess and Members**
 - Pass around book suggestion sheet; have members add books to the list and give a short report on why the club should read this book
 - Select books to read for next months, if needed
 - Report on club projects and activities such as recruiting volunteer for community projects such as reading to preschool children at daycare centers, etc
 - Report on club special activities
- **Program - Discussion Leader or other**
 - Most months the program will focus on book discussion; some months the club may want to have an alternate program such as a local author or local librarian
- **Reminders for next Meeting – Hostess**
 - Remind members about reading of assigned book
 - Remind next month's hostess and discussion leader
- **Enjoy refreshments and conversation with other members. Leave as needed.**

Homemaker Book Club Job Descriptions and Responsibilities

Hostess – responsible for planning and preparing for meeting

- Selecting meeting location (some clubs rotate between member homes, public meeting spaces, local restaurants or other locations)
- Preparing refreshments or organizing other food event such as at a restaurant or a potluck
- *Sending out meeting reminders with any special instructions
- * Be aware of club projects and activities; lead club discussion regarding projects
- * Solicit book ideas from members
- * Facilitate book selections if needed
- * Remind members of assigned book; remind next month's hostess and discussion leader

Club Leader – some clubs prefer to have someone responsible each month for club organization and communication. See hostess responsibilities marked with * for some suggested responsibilities.

Discussion Leader - each month the discussion leader will:

- **Prepare for the book club discussion.** This will include researching information about the author, the period the book is set and the subject of the book. It may help to have the person who suggested the book also be the discussion leader.
- **Have discussion questions ready.** Some discussion leaders share discussion questions with members before the books are read. As members read, they can note passages that relate to the questions. If you do this you will need to pass out questions at the meeting before the book is read. You could also send questions to members. Some general discussion questions might include:
 - What is your favorite passage?
 - Which characters are your favorites? Describe their development. Did the characters change? Did your opinions of the characters change? Why? How?
 - What is the message the author is bringing to the reader? What did you learn from this book? Was it educational? Was it entertaining? Why or why not?
 - What meaning does the title bring to the book? Why did the author choose the title? What is its significance?
 - Where in this book were you “hooked”? At what point were you no longer able to put the book down. Why or why not did this happen?
- **Find additional discussion questions** in a variety of places:
 - If you are reading a book that has been an Oprah Book Club selection, many of the books have printable versions of discussion questions.

- Many publishers' websites include reading guides or discussion questions for their titles. (You may also find author background information, interviews and more!) These links will help you get started:
 - ✓ **HarperCollins (includes Avon Books, Amistad Press and William & Morrow)**
www.harpercollins.com/hc/readers/fiction.asp
 - ✓ **Random House (includes Knopf, Doubleday, Pantheon, Vintage Books, and Schocken)** www.randomhouse.com
 - ✓ **Penguin Putnam, Inc. (includes Viking, Dutton, Plume and Signet)** www.penguinputnam.com
 - ✓ **Time Warner Books (includes Little, Brown and Company)**
www.twbookmark.com/books/reading_guides.html
- **Talk with the local public librarian.** He may help you find additional sources for discussion questions. He may have other ideas.

Tips for facilitating discussion during the book club meeting:

- Don't panic if this is your first time as a discussion leader. Just relax and follow your discussion plan. This is probably a first time for most of the club members. Everyone will become more comfortable as the discussion moves on.
- Begin with an easy question such as "who was your favorite character". Go around the room and encourage everyone to talk about what they have read and give the group a chance to comment.
- Learn to handle problem members. If someone goes on too long, politely go on to the next person.
- Keep the discussion interesting. Learn to probe quiet members who may want to add to the discussion.
- You don't have to talk about every question. If the members don't have a lot to say about a topic or don't seem interested, move on.
- Ask the group if they have additional questions they would like to discuss.
- Keep your group on track; avoid a discussion that turns into a gossip fest. Set some ground rules if necessary.

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Extension Homemaker Book Club

Discussion Leader and Book Signup

MONTH	NAME of BOOK	NAME of DISCUSSION LEADER	NOTES and REMINDERS

Extension Homemaker Book Club

Attendance List for 20____

Name	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June	Notes