Running a Book Club: Tips and Tricks

MATTHEW NOE
LAMAR SOUTTER LIBRARY, FELLOW
NNLM NER, GRAPHIC MEDICINE SPECIALIST

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Outline

- Book Club Basics
- Safe Space
- Answering Why
- Discussing How
- Case Study
- Resources
Book Club Basics

- What kind of book club?
  - Academic? Social? Somewhere in between?

- What book(s)?
  - Non-fiction? Fiction?
  - Prose vs Poetry vs Comics
  - Equally important: who decides?

- How many members?
  - ALA suggests between 8 and 16.
  - I think the sweet spot is more like 4 to 10.
Book Club Basics Continued

- How often should you meet?
  - In many ways, this is determined by the purpose of the club

- Where should you meet?
  - Somewhere convenient to all members
  - Ideal is a calm, quiet space, without technological distractions

- Communication
  - Email? Social media? Phone?
Meeting Structure

- Largely determined by style of club, but some basics include...
  
  - Have a facilitator, but let everyone else guide the discussion.
    - There to fill the inevitable awkward silence, keep discussion “on track”, and to ensure everyone has a chance to speak
  
  - Set ground rules
    - Will vary, but usually avoid cliquish behavior, say more than “like/dislike”, and discuss how to handle disagreements (they WILL happen!)
  
  - Decide how to handle people who haven’t read the book.
    - Include them, but be explicit about spoilers if there are concerns
  
  - Consider if you will be discussion-only, or if there will be games, presentations, hand-outs, etc.
Evaluation

- Typically not necessary for social book clubs

- If your club is part of formal education or if you are trying to prove value...
  - Participant feedback is key
  - Map themes of text to discussion to learning outcomes
  - Be mindful of the limitations of self-reporting
  - Highly recommended reading: Book club elective to facilitate student learning of the patient experience with chronic disease. [PMCID: PMC2865403](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2865403)
The First Rule of Book Club
is Don’t Talk about Book Club!
“Why should we do this?”

- Book Clubs support...
  - Literacy
  - Empathy Development
  - The Role of Literature in Society (or Medicine)
  - Social Engagement
  - Networking
  - The Library’s Relationship with the Community or Institution
  - Internal and External Partnerships
“How are we going to do this?”

- Partners, Partners, Partners!
  - Internal & External
- What are institutional goals? How can we map a book club to them?
  - Ex. Diversity (blanket-term)
- Structure & Institutional Culture
  - Lunch and Learns
  - Formal vs Informal
  - Interdepartmental vs Intradepartmental
  - Whole Book vs Sections
Case Study: NNLM NER Reads *Marbles*

- The NNLM NER staff used our Mental Health Graphic Medicine Book Club Kit
- Staff had 5 weeks to read the book, though most reported reading it in a few hours.
- Matthew facilitated, made extensive use of discussion guides supplied with the book*
- Discussion focused on experience of reading the comic (5 of the 7 were not comics readers)
- Discussed the role of prior knowledge in the understanding of the text
- Overall impression: valuable, gave new insight into the experience of bipolar disorder. Comics format well-suited to mental illness.
Helpful Resources


- Reading Group Guides: http://www.readinggroupguides.com/

- Book Publishers
  - Note that not all publishers provide guides and certainly not for all books. (Guides for comics are virtually non-existent.)
Further Reading


- Book clubs—outreach opportunities for hospital libraries. [DOI: 10.1080/02763869.2014.957096]

- Book club elective to facilitate student learning of the patient experience with chronic disease. [PMCID: PMC2865403]


- The bad bugs book club: science, literacy, and engagement. [PMCID: PMC3706141]

- Book discussion course: timely topics for medical students. [DOI: 10.1080/02763869.2014.897513]
Questions?

Request a Graphic Medicine Book Club Kit at: www.nnlm.gov/ner/kits!

Feel free to contact me any time at:

Matthew.Noe@umassmed.edu
@NoetheMatt on Twitter