



How to Start (or Find) a Book Club

Your #ReadWithSharon guide to the joy of reading together

If you've been meaning to read more, here's the best advice I know: don't do it alone. A book club turns reading from something you keep meaning to get to into something you actually look forward to. You'll finish more books, discover authors you'd never have found on your own, and — my favorite part — you'll have people to talk them over with. Whether you'd rather join a club or start one around your own kitchen table, here's everything you need to get going.

How a book club works

Most clubs follow a simple rhythm. A group of readers — often four to a dozen — picks one book, then meets to talk about it, usually once a month. That monthly get-together is the secret: knowing everyone gathers on the 15th is exactly the gentle nudge that gets you to the last chapter. A typical club:

- Meets about once a month, for an hour or two
- Reads one agreed-upon book between meetings
- Rotates who picks the book and who hosts
- Gathers somewhere comfortable — a living room, a coffee shop, a library room, or a video call
- Keeps it low-pressure: good conversation matters more than perfect attendance

There's no rulebook and no dues. The only real requirement is a shared love of a good story.

Not every club is the same — find your kind

Before you join or start one, it helps to know what you're after. Clubs tend to fall along three lines, and knowing your preference will point you to the right one:

- *Social or serious.* Some clubs are really a monthly get-together with friends, where the book is a happy excuse to gather. Others are for deep readers who arrive with notes and want to dig into theme and character. Neither is better — but a mismatch is the quickest way to feel out of place, so decide which you want.
- *Genre or anything-goes.* Many clubs read a bit of everything; others organize around a genre — historical fiction, mystery, romance, literary fiction, memoir, or nonfiction. If you know what you love, a genre club is a wonderful fit. If you like to be surprised, an all-genres club will stretch you.
- *In person, online, or both.* In-person clubs are cozy and local. Online clubs (like mine) welcome readers from anywhere and are easy to join from your couch. Plenty of clubs now do a mix of the two.

Where to find a club near you

They're more common than you might think. Good places to start looking:

- Your public library — most host free monthly clubs and can point you toward others
- Independent and chain bookstores, many of which run in-store clubs
- Community centers, senior centers, and places of worship
- Your workplace or neighborhood association
- Online: Goodreads groups, Meetup, Bookclubs.com, The StoryGraph, and local Facebook groups
- Author and celebrity clubs you can follow from anywhere — including #ReadWithSharon

If the first one isn't quite right, don't give up — try another. The right group feels less like a class and more like finding your people.

How to start your own

Can't find one you love? Start one. It's easier than you'd think:

- 1. Round up a few readers.** Three to eight is the sweet spot — big enough for lively talk, small enough that everyone gets to speak. Friends, neighbors, coworkers, family.
- 2. Agree on the vibe.** Social or serious? A genre or a free-for-all? Ten minutes on this up front saves a lot later.
- 3. Decide how you'll pick books.** Rotate the choice each month, vote from a short list, or let the host choose. Any of these works.
- 4. Set a time and place.** Choose a regular cadence — monthly is standard — and lock in the first date before everyone leaves.
- 5. Choose an easy first book.** Something well-loved and not too long builds momentum. Save the 700-page epic for later.
- 6. Keep it welcoming.** No quizzes, no shame for not finishing, and always a little something to eat. People come back for the company as much as the book.

A few tips to keep it going

- Rotate hosts so no one carries the whole load
- Keep a handful of discussion questions ready in case the talk stalls
- End each meeting by locking in the next book and date
- It's okay to abandon a book nobody's enjoying — reading should be a pleasure, not a punishment

Come read with me

If an online club sounds right, I'd love to have you at #ReadWithSharon — my monthly historical fiction book club, where readers from across the U.S. and Canada read one carefully chosen novel and then meet the author live on Zoom to talk about the story and the history behind it. It's warm, welcoming, and a wonderful way to fall back in love with reading.

Find the club, the full #ReadWithSharon Bookshelf, and more at SharonVirts.com/BetweenTheLines. I hope to see you there.

Happy reading,

— Sharon