

# **COMMON QUESTIONS FOR BOOK AND FILM DISCUSSION GROUPS**

## **Getting started**

Can you think of a few friends who like to read good books and watch good films? If yes, then you already have all you need to start your own book or film group. There are several different ways to start your group. You might like a group to meet at school, at home, or at your public library. Here are some hints for getting started.

## **First things first**

### **How big should your group be?**

Do you want a big meeting where lots of different people offer their brief opinions or do you prefer to have a small group, where everyone knows each other and there is lots of time to talk? Decide this first, because that will make a difference in where your group will meet.

### **How do you advertise your groups?**

You may want to ask neighbors, friends and classmates to join your group if you want to control who joins. You can also advertise at local libraries and bookstores, video stores and school and community newsletters. If you are a librarian or are working with a librarian, consider advertising for the group through flyers and publicity releases.

### **Where will your group meet?**

Depending on the size of your group, you have lots of options. You could meet at each other's homes, where you can sit on comfy couches or lay around on the floor. Or your school or public librarian may be interested in helping you get started by letting you hold your meetings in the library. Local bookstores may also let you use their space for meeting. Discussion groups at restaurants, whether fancy or fast food, can be fun too. Ask your potential members what would make it easiest for them to attend. Remember, almost any place you can sit and talk with friends has potential to become a meeting spot.

## **How do we start?**

Set a date for an "organizational" meeting. Send out invitations or flyers to your potential members. If you would like to get some new members that you might not know, ask your school or public librarian if they will let you post your flyer in the library. At the meeting, introduce people to your idea of a discussion group. Make some decisions on how big your group will be, where you will meet and the books/films you want to discuss. Now you are all set to talk.

## **How do we get multiple copies of the chosen book?**

If you have access to a large public library system, you can put holds on multiple copies of the book. You could also try to interlibrary loan copies from area libraries. Another option is to get a small grant to purchase paperback copies. Depending on your group, you can decide whether you are going to gather the books or have the members be responsible for getting their own copy.

## **How do you start the discussion?**

A wonderful way to start the discussion is to simply say: "So, what did you like about this book/film?" Once everyone has weighed in with his or her opinion, you can use prepared discussion questions to continue the conversation or, you might find that participants have enough to say to carry the entire meeting.

## **What if nobody talks?**

Ask your book group members to say what they liked about the book/film first. Give everyone a chance to talk about the positive aspects of a book/film before anyone cuts in with a negative comment. While it is perfectly fine to talk about what you don't like about a book/film, it is sometimes hard to talk about the good aspects of a book when someone else has already trashed it! You might want to do some research on the author's life and other books that you can share with your members. Rotate responsibility for leading the discussion and researching the author. Now you are ready to go!

## **In parent-child book groups, how do you discourage adults from dominating the discussion?**

If a parent or adult is dominating the discussion, find a moment to step in and say, "I would like to hear what the students think about this book/film," or "As teenagers today, what do you guys think of this?"

" Redirecting the focus to the younger members often works. If the problem persists, it is your job as facilitator to address the issue with the adult, in private outside of the group.

## **Should members attend if they haven't read the book or seen the film?**

Hopefully, enough members will have read the book or seen the film to keep the conversation vital. One rule your group might decide on is that if you haven't read the book or seen the film then you can't disrupt the conversation of those who have. Members often will want to attend the group just to see the other members or to vote on the following months' books. That is just fine. Make sure you talk with your group ahead of time on how you want to handle this issue and then stick to it.