



Transcript

A Good Read

My New Book Club

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Book clubs strike me as being very structured. They meet on a set date each month. They read one book per month. They select their monthly readings 12 months in advance. And some book clubs use prescribed questions to prompt discussion.

I'm sorry, but that doesn't work for me. I don't like structure, I like serendipity. And I'm a slow reader. The pleasure of reading can be hampered when one reads under pressure, and one book per month? For me, that is a laughable goal. And knowing what I'll be reading 12 months in advance? Where is the adventure! There is no room for a change of heart! And why would I want prescribed questions? Isn't the point that book club members bring their own thoughts, feelings and reading experiences to the group?

So there are the things I don't like. What do I like? I like reading, and I love to discuss ideas and share experiences. How can this not be conducive to being part of a book club?

In January I went travelling through India with some close friends and their two children aged 6 and 8. For four weeks we hopped from city to city indulging in cross cultural experiences, music, history and food. And on the long journeys between destinations, and during restful afternoons in hotel rooms or on beaches, we read. At night the children read to us out loud from books they brought from home. On our travels, they chose new things to read such as Indian comics and other story books about Indian Gods and culture and read them. Sometimes they read quietly, other times they read out loud.

The adults read out loud as well to each other allowing us to share funny snippets from our dense novels, or points of interest from our even denser travel guides. Together, we discovered how lovely it is to share the books we read with other readers.

Perhaps it was on one of our long road trips - or was it over a long pot of chai tea? Or while sampling yet another Indian sweet shop - that my friend and I began discussing the joy of sharing reading with other readers. We also discussed the limitations of book clubs which lead us to the obvious conclusion that we should start our own book club!

The benefits of an independent book club among friends were clear. The first point my friend made was, "Sandhya, you're a librarian, you can get us all the books!" I raised the second point which was of equal importance. "Jackie, you're super creative, you can make afternoon teas that are themed with what we have read!"

I think this was followed up with a reminder that I have an ice cream machine and we may have made other food related plans. Then we agreed that we could take as long as we needed to read the

book. There would be absolutely no deadlines for readers. And each time we gathered to discuss our book, we would decide as a group what we might like to read next, and being the librarian, I would make it happen.

We weren't sure if anyone else in our network of friends would actually want to join a book club as we were all in the same boat. We all work full time, some have children or other commitments and nobody can easily fit into a structured book club. Our flexible model however has attracted a total of 7 members with 2 others who said that while they don't read they will still come for the home made ice cream.

So with our book club, everyone is welcome, even the non readers. Who knows, they might find themselves inspired to read in the future!

So last January we developed the model for a book club that would work for us. Come September we thought perhaps it was time that we invite people to join us. By October everyone had a copy of Alice Sebold's *The Almost Moon* and in December we will have our first club meeting. So along with reading the book, my preparation include putting my ice cream machine to work.

The funny thing is, we have already started talking about the book. Nobody minds this premature discussion ó we just don't talk past the earliest chapter that we share. And if we can't talk about *The Almost Moon* we talk about Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* instead because we all read it years ago. And we have all seen the film.

We have already compared the suburb where the protagonist lives in *The Almost Moon* to the suburb where *The Lovely Bones* is set, recognising the consistency of the author's writing style; and the angst that we felt approaching the later chapters considering how the book starts; and where the story could take the reader when in chapter one the protagonist suffocates her ailing mother and leaves her body in the basement after cutting off her braid. It is always interesting when a book begins with a climax..

These casual conversations have not spoilt the experience at all. If anything, I am looking forward to our first meeting more because we have built momentum to our discussion. We have done so while attending our children's parties, our friendly poker games, each others work functions and when visiting each other casually.

I couldn't join a standard book club and neither could my friends. We need the flexibility. We need something quite different so that it works for us. And if it takes us a year to all read the book, we need that. And if we want to change our minds about what we read, we need that too. And we need home made ice cream. And other foods that are themed to the book.

I don't think that comes with a standard book club.