

## Tips for Starting a Young Adult Dystopian Book Club

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When starting a young adult book club, dystopian and post-apocalyptic fiction are important novels to consider because they wrestle with “deep societal and moral issues” (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013). Scholes and Ostenson (2013) explain that as teens develop, they can understand more complex and abstract ideas. They often develop an interest in social and political issues as they try to find their place in society (Scholes & Ostenson, 2013). A book club can introduce teens to these concepts through reading and discussion. It is also a good way to achieve many of Search Institute’s (1997) 40 developmental assets. These are qualities and experiences that can support teen’s healthy development (Search Institute, 1997). Studies show that the more exposure teens have to these assets, the more success and well-being they will have as adults (Search Institute, 1997). A book club encourages reading for pleasure and provides both peer and adult relationships for teens. Paired with the integrity and social responsibility to be gained from reading dystopian novels, a YA dystopian book club could bring immense developmental value for teens. Book clubs come in many shapes and sizes. Here are some ideas to consider when starting one of your own.

### **Step 1: Choosing the books**

When selecting the book for your book club to read, it is important to keep your audience in mind (Heard, 2015). If you are designing a book club for younger teens, make sure the books are appropriate for their reading level (Heard, 2015). If the book club is aimed at older teens, try to select books that they will find engaging (Heard, 2015). It is most important to select books that represent a broad range of voices and experiences. This promotes diversity and inclusivity. Once the book club gets going, take book suggestions from members (Heard, 2015). A lot of dystopian novels are part of a series. When selecting series fiction for a book club, one school librarian stresses the importance of reading the first book only (Heard, 2015). That way the members who enjoyed it can explore the rest of the series on their own (Heard, 2015).

It is also important to consider the availability of the book you select. If the book club is small, there may be enough copies available through the library. Be sure to allow enough time for everyone to sign out and read the book. Consider reserving a few copies specifically for book club members (Hermione’s Secret Library, 2018). If the book club is large, investigate partnerships with schools or local bookstores and explore the funding opportunities available to you (Hermione’s Secret Library, 2018). One book club, the result of a partnership between a school and a public library, applied for funding through the school, and was able to buy enough copies of the book for each member (Baur & Lee, 2012).

### **Step 2: Scheduling and promotion**

When planning a book club, it is important to think about how the meetings will work. Will you meet once a week, or once a month? How long will the meetings be? The answers to these questions depend on the members of the book club and on the book selection. A graphic novel book club for example, was able to meet every week because graphic novels can be read very quickly (Baur & Lee, 2012). If the book club is happening in a school, the meetings may be limited by the length of time available during lunch breaks (Heard, 2015). If it is an after-school program, perhaps it could be longer. It may be worth hosting an initial meeting to gauge interest and then sorting out the schedule with those who are interested in attending. Heard (2015), began her book club with a meeting to gauge interest and was overwhelmed by the response.

Promotion is very important for a new program. Again, it depends on the audience. Sharing the event on social media is a good start. If there are teens who are already interested in joining, encourage them to invite a friend (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018). Even if the book club is not a partnership with a school, reaching out to local schools is a great way to let teens know about the event (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018). Try to promote it in places where teens frequent, go beyond the walls of the library.

### **Step 3: Running the meeting**

When running the book club meeting, try to make it fun. If possible, include snacks (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018). A book club should not feel like another assignment for school (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018). The aim is to promote reading for pleasure, so the book club meetings should encourage members to have fun (Heard, 2015). One school librarian was very aware of differentiating the book club from school, so instead of using questions, she created games and activities based on the book they were reading (Heard, 2015). Another tip is to avoid forced conversation (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018). If the conversation about the book only lasts a little while, allow the teens to discuss other books or interests with each other. The aim of the book club is to enjoy reading, and sometimes, forcing discussion just makes it feel like another assignment (Hermione's Secret Library, 2018).

### **Book club discussion questions to start the conversation (Preston, 2020)**

- What did you like about this book?
- What did you dislike about this book?
- What other books does this book remind you of?
- Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
- If you could ask the author of this book anything, what would you ask?
- What did you think of the characters? Were they believable?
- If you could hear this story from another person's point of view, who's point of view would you choose?

## **References**

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