BOOK CLUB FACILITATION TIPS

Best practices for facilitating a book club—in person, virtual, and hybrid.

General tips

- Establish expectations. This can be done with a set of rules the teens come up with during the first meeting.
- Manage participation during hybrid or virtual programming; use the chat function to entice those that are quieter.
- Adjust your facilitation style. If the club is for multiple days in a month, be flexible with what is working and what is not.
- Make sure to keep an eye on the time.
- Make sure that everyone who wishes to speak, does.
- If the entire group is very quiet, try some icebreakers.

Leading Discussions

When discussing sensitive topics, it’s important to lay some ground rules and be ready to facilitate the discussion in order to manage conflict and probe deeper into certain topics. Ground rules or group agreements provide a set of expectations for all discussion participants. Samples include:

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Share “air time.”
- If you are offended or uncomfortable, say so, and say why.
- It’s OK to disagree, but don’t personalize it; stick to the issue. No name-calling or stereotyping.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
One person speaks at a time.
Personal stories stay in the group, unless we all agree that we can share them.
We share responsibility for making the conversation productive.¹

**During the Discussion: Be an Active Facilitator**

Being an active facilitator doesn’t mean taking over the conversation. Here are several strategies for helping the discussion along:

- **Reflect and Clarify**
  Restate an idea or thought to make it clearer.
  - “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly . . . ”
  - “What I believe you are saying is . . . ”

- **Summarize**
  Briefly state the main thoughts.
  - “It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes . . . ”

- **Shift Focus**
  Move from one speaker or topic to another.
  - “Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?”
  - “We’ve been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?”

- **Ask Probing or Follow-Up Questions**
  Use questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives, and uncover common ground.
  - “What are the key points here?”
  - “What would someone with a different point of view say?”

Manage Conflict
Help manage conflict and disagreement to be productive.
- “Let’s refer to our ground rules.”
- “What seems to be at the heart of this issue?”
- “What do others think?”

Use Silence
Allow time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

Use Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)
Recognize and understand how people communicate without using words. Consider how you are sending signals from your own body and how to signal encouragement and participation.

During the Discussion: Challenging and Controversial Topics
- Start each discussion by reminding the students of ground rules that everyone’s opinions, ideas, and feelings are to be respected at all times.
- Explain that the book club takes place in a “brave space,” not just a “safe space.” Read more about brave spaces here.
- Research short biographies or videos about adults who can speak on a topic to accompany a discussion that young adults might connect with. For example, an author or athlete:
  - Angie Thomas, author, on racism, US police brutality and black representation (BBC HARDtalk, 2019)
  - How Colin Kaepernick went from football star to civil rights icon (Nightline)