

The Book Corner Club

Everyone loves a good story. Telling stories, listening to stories, reading stories and talking about stories are activities enjoyed by people of all ages all over the world. Starting a Book Corner Club is a wonderful, fun way to combine a love of a good story with learning English, as you practise and improve your speaking, listening, writing and vocabulary, as well as your reading.

But what is a Book Corner Club?

A Book Corner Club is when a group of perhaps six or seven people choose a Graded Reader to read and then meet informally, with or without a teacher present, to talk about the story.

When your Book Corner Club meets, you can use the opportunity to talk about the plot, the characters and the themes. You can discuss and answer questions and give opinions. To help you do this, you all complete worksheets while you read. Each person in the group or Book Corner Club has a different role. Each role has an accompanying worksheet. For example, one person – known as the Chair – should lead the conversation and ask questions. One person – the Words and Grammar Researcher – can look at the words that are used in the story, or can look for new words (there are often definitions in the glossary at the back of the Graded Reader). Another person can think about the characters and their relationships and discuss these with the group.

When your Club has discussed the story you have read, you can write a review or create a presentation about the Graded Reader and then together the Club can choose a new title to read for your next meeting. There is more information about how to organise your Club later in this guide.

Why organise a Book Corner Club?

Apart from the fact that everyone loves a story and a get-together with people who have shared interests, most of the English you read in your classroom will be individual sentences, short reading texts or exam practice material. These texts are usually chosen by your teacher. In a Book Corner Club, you read a complete story that you and your group have specially chosen for yourselves, and you are reading it for pleasure. Of course, it will also help you improve your English!

How can a Book Corner Club help your English?

The more you read, the more words become familiar; the more words become familiar, the faster you read and the more vocabulary you learn. Graded Readers are written to help you meet new vocabulary in a clear context (sometimes with illustrations), and words are repeated to help you remember them. Grammar structures also become more familiar as you see them again and again, and you learn to know when your own grammar 'sounds right'. Graded Readers are written at different levels, so you can choose a story which you feel comfortable reading.

Once you know your role and you have your worksheet, you can take notes about the Graded Reader before the Club meets to talk about the story. This way you can prepare your thoughts and ideas about the Reader, and as a result you will also feel better prepared and more confident about speaking.

You will find that the more you read, the more confident you will feel about speaking to your Book Corner Club mates in English. As a result, your ability to read and speak English will quickly improve!

How to organise your Book Corner Club

Who, where, and when

The best way to start a Book Corner Club is by finding six or seven other people who also enjoy reading (this is the most important consideration), and who want to improve their English. If you have more than six or seven people in your Club either your meetings will be very long or some people won't have time to speak. It is also important that the group members are around the same reading level. You can check your reading level by doing the Level Test on this website.

You then need to decide where and when you are going to meet. You probably feel more relaxed when you are away from your classroom, so a cafeteria in your college, or a nearby coffee shop would make a relaxing setting for your meetings. You could also meet at each other's houses or flats. In the summer you can meet outdoors, in parks, or a garden. Be sure to choose a place where the noise is not too loud, though!

A meeting can last any length of time but the shortest should be around 35-40 minutes. Ideally, a Book Corner Club meets every two weeks, depending on the members' other responsibilities. Be careful, however, not to leave a long time between meetings as you may forget the story of the Reader you are discussing!

Choosing a Graded Reader

When you have decided who, where and when, you need to get together to choose a Graded Reader that you all want to read. A good starting point is for each Club member to look at this list of types of story and decide which ones they like or don't like:

Crime and thriller	Biography	Detective	Mystery	Travel	Romance
Horror or ghost	Historical	Humour	Adventure	Books with films	Fantasy
Classical literature	Sci-fi	Short stories	Plays		

Then find out which types are the most popular. Ask your teachers if you can look at the Macmillan Readers catalogue or search through the Graded Readers in your library. Read the information on the back cover (the 'blurb') and look at the picture on the front (like you do when you go to a book shop to choose a book in your own language). You can also ask a friend or other students to recommend a Graded Reader. If you know of other Book Corner Clubs, you could ask them which Graded Readers they enjoyed most.

When you think you have found an interesting Reader, read the first page of the story. The story should be easy for you to read (but not too easy!), suitable for your level, and motivating. It is a good idea to look at the level of the Graded Readers and find one that is a level below your class level, at least for the first book you read, so that you can read quickly and without difficulty.

Remember that if there are six or seven people in your Club, you will probably choose several different books, so try to agree on two or three and then choose one for your first Book Corner Club meeting. The first meeting should take place within two weeks after choosing the Graded Reader. This will keep the group's interest and also give them time to read the Reader.

Who's who?

When you have decided which book you are going to read for your first Book Corner Club meeting, print out the Worksheets, making sure you choose the right level of Worksheet for your group, and have a look at the roles described later in this guide. Read the roles together, then discuss each one in turn. Find out what each role means, which part of the story it involves (character, plot, language etc.), then look at the worksheet for each role and decide which Club member will take each role for the first meeting. Check that each person knows exactly what they should prepare for the meeting.

If you have any doubts or questions about the roles, ask your teacher to help you at this stage.

The roles are numbered so that if there are six people in your Club, you should use roles 1–6; if there are seven people, you should use roles 1–7.

The roles are:

- 1 **The Chair.** The Chair leads the meeting, asking questions that he or she has prepared about the story, making comments and inviting opinions. The Chair also makes sure that everyone has a chance to speak and makes notes.
- 2 **The Theme Secretary.** The Theme Secretary looks at the themes in the story and decides which are the most important. The Theme Secretary is also the secretary at the meetings and takes notes. You can then either ask the secretary to write a summary of everyone's opinion, or (as it might be a lot of work) use the notes to write a Club summary, as a group.
- 3 **The Plotter.** The Plotter looks for and notes down the main actions and events which form the plot of the story. He or she also explains what is happening in the illustrations.
- 4 **The Character Artist.** The Character Artist decides who the main characters are and creates a physical and psychological description of them. The Character Artist also draws a family tree or diagram to explain the relationship between the different characters.
- 5 **The Words and Grammar Researcher.** The Words and Grammar Researcher chooses ten new words from the story that they think are interesting and that he or she likes, and then explains his or her choices. He or she also decides which seven or eight words are key words in the story. The Word Researcher may also like to talk about some of the grammar and structures used in the story, particularly ones that are new to the group.
- 6 **The Language Expert.** The Language Expert looks for the most interesting or effective passages in the story. They can choose a descriptive passage which they think is very good at helping the reader visualise the people/places/situations. The Language Expert can choose complex or slightly difficult passages that they found tricky to understand and/or they can choose memorable passages that they enjoyed while they were reading.
- 7 **The Setting Recorder.** The Setting Recorder looks at information in the story about the geographical and historical settings, and discusses how important these settings are to the themes of the story.

Each time you plan a meeting and choose a Graded Reader, you should change roles. For example, the person who takes role 1 in the first meeting could take role 2 in the second, then role 3 and so on. This gives everyone the chance to read in different ways and to take on different responsibilities within the Club.

If, on the day you plan to meet, one of the Club members can't attend, ask them to give their notes to The Chair or the Theme Secretary; this way everyone is still responsible for their contribution to the Club.

What happens at a Book Corner Club meeting?

When you meet, the Chair starts the meeting by asking questions and commenting on the Reader. He or she then invites comment. When the Chair has finished, he or she invites the Theme Secretary to speak. The Chair then asks each Club member to speak in turn. When each member has reported on their worksheet task, the group may have a general conversation about the story. The important thing is that everyone enjoys the experience of sharing their opinions on the story in English. When the meeting has finished, a Club may choose to do a group activity, such as prepare a presentation for classmates, or a quiz for Club members.

If there is another Book Corner Club in your class or college, it is a good idea to check your understanding of the roles with them.

After your Book Corner Club meeting, you may like to keep a reading journal or portfolio. You can do this either in a notebook, or in a web-based 'blog' in which your Club writes about your story as you read, or after the meeting – in English of course. You can write short summaries of the story you have just read, you can record your feelings about characters and your opinions on events. You can even write about how you feel about reading in English.

You can share your journal with your teacher if you want, or with your class, as a way of sharing ideas. It can be used as the basis for other Book Corner Club discussions, and you can use it to recommend Graded Readers to your classmates. You can also use it to observe your progress towards the objectives in the Common European Framework. Your teacher shouldn't correct any errors unless you ask him or her to.

So, the important points to remember are:

- A Book Corner Club combines the enjoyment of reading a story with improving your English.
- It will help you improve your listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary, grammar and reading skills.
- The Club chooses what to read. A teacher can help if you wish, but a Book Corner Club does not need the presence of a teacher.
- The Club should choose a Graded Reader that is one level below your class level, at least for the first meeting or two. If not in the same class, members of the Club should be at the same reading level.
- The Club should choose a Graded Reader in the same way you would choose a book in your own language – by looking for something that you think you will enjoy.
- The Club is informal and normally does not take place in a classroom.
- Each person at a Club meeting has prepared a different task. Absent members should give their notes to another Club member to read out for them.
- Each person has a role, and each person changes their role at the next Club meeting.
- The Club members discuss the roles before the first meeting, so that everyone understands fully what they should look for and prepare while reading.
- Everyone has the chance to speak.
- Everyone has notes to help them speak.

- There are no right or wrong answers; the Club is about conversation and informal discussion.
- The Club meets at least twice a month to keep everyone's interest and involvement.
- The Club is not like a regular English class; there is usually no teacher, the materials have been chosen by you, the Club is run by you, the conversation is controlled by you.
- And finally.... a Book Corner Club is fun, relaxing and enjoyable!

The Worksheets

The Worksheets are divided into two levels, Beginner/Elementary and Intermediate/Upper Intermediate. If you're not sure which level you are, ask your teacher which level she or he feels is more suited to your Club.

The Worksheets are numbered to match the roles described above. If you are using the Intermediate/Upper Intermediate Worksheets, you may like to read the section '*Writing an Essay – an introduction to key concepts and literary terms*' on the Academic Writing section of this website.

Before you read the Graded Reader your Club has chosen, read through your role and task carefully and check your understanding either with classmates, other Club members or a teacher. Use the task as a guideline to help you focus your reading in a particular way – for example, looking at the characters' relationships – and to take notes as you read, or after each chapter or two.

When you finish, and before your Club meeting, you can use your worksheet notes to help you practise what you want to say. Take the worksheet to the meeting and refer to it whenever you want. You do not have to show your worksheet to your teacher, or to any of the other people in the Club, it is purely to help you get the most out of your reading.