

# Book Clubs During Power Hour

## Benefits of a Book Club

- Provides an opportunity to make friends
- Supports authentic conversation and deeper connections between individuals
- Develops youths' ability to share ideas and opinions in a diverse environment
- Improves critical thinking
- Inspires a love of reading
- Allows us to laugh and have fun together

## Group Size

The size of a book club can range from two to seven, but ideally four or five, members. The larger the group, the more proficient the readers should be. With young or struggling readers, a group of two or three members would be best.

Smaller groups may even be able to “buddy read,” which means youth take turns whispering parts of the text together. This method provides developing readers with the support of a peer reading at the same level.

## Selecting Appropriate Books

Every child progresses as a reader at a different pace. Some third graders may be ready for a fifth grade level text, while some fifth graders may need books at a third grade level to be successful.

Research shows that when youth read books within a “zone of proximal development,” significant growth with reading skills can occur. On the flip side, when a child selects a book that is too difficult (or even too easy), limited growth occurs.

For adult facilitators, one of the most challenging parts of developing a book club is gently steering youth to the right texts. Youth development professionals should consider youths' self-confidence and self-esteem when helping them select texts.

To select the right book, encourage youth to use the Five Finger Rule. They should open a book and try to read a full page. As they read, they should put up one finger for each word they don't know. When they finish the page, the total number of fingers they raised for unknown words rates the book for their current reading level as follows:

- 0-1 finger: This book is too easy
- 2-5 fingers: This book is just right
- More than 5 fingers: This book is too hard

While “just right” books are ideal for book club, the other types of books have their benefits.

“Too hard” or more difficult books can also be considered “stretch books.” If a book is just out of reach for a Club participant, consider including the young person in the group with the understanding that the book choice is a “stretch book” – a challenging book that will require extra focus and motivation. Be sure to balance “stretch books” with other “just right” books that align with the child’s own reading level.

“Too easy” or less difficult books can also be considered “curiosity books.” Books below an individual’s reading level or “just for fun” can build reading confidence and help grow youths’ love of reading. Consider balancing “too hard” and “just right” books with books below youths’ reading level when books are related to high-interest topics for youth. You can supplement “curiosity books” with rich discussions and additional research or reading projects to foster greater literacy skills.

### ***Finding Copies of Books for Each Book Club Member***

Consider the availability of books before providing book choices to the Club. There are many ways to acquire books.

- Provide members with a short list of books and a summary of their plots. After youth select a book, it is their responsibility to check out a copy from their school or public library, or buy their own copy. Be sure to let the members know when to bring the book to Club meetings.
- Partner with the local school to check out books. In addition to school media centers, many schools have levelled libraries, which typically have multiple copies of texts identified by reading levels.
- Partner with a local library to check out books. Many libraries have “book club bags” allowing teachers or facilitators to check out multiple copies of a book at a time. Librarians are also skilled in reader’s advisory – the process of helping a reader select the right book based on their interests.
- If e-readers or tablets are available to members, partner with libraries to borrow electronic books, or use other online services to borrow low-cost or no-cost electronic copies (e.g., Open eBooks). Also consider maintaining a small budget to purchase e-books and allow youth to borrow them from a shared Club account.

### ***Maintaining Book Clubs Throughout the Year***

Because these book clubs don’t take place within a classroom, consider several options to maintain the group.

- Form groups based on shared interest in a topic or type of book. Youth can stay together over a period of time and select books based on their shared interest.
- Depending on youths’ interest in the selected book, members may opt in when they want to read a particular book, or opt out if not.

***Volunteer Support for Book Clubs***

Source additional resources and input both inside and outside the Club.

- Check in with teachers to get their input and possible engagement with the book club. They can suggest appropriate books to compliment what is happening at school.
- Assign volunteers to work with the book club, since it's a smaller group of youth and the activity has a clear outcome, but with opportunities for creativity.
- Pair the book club with other programs, like Smart Girls, Passport to Manhood or Torch Club.