



FACING
HISTORY
AND
OURSELVES

Remote Book Clubs

Nurturing Community
and Connection

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Nurturing Community and Connection

During this period of physical distancing and remote learning, it is both more challenging and more important than ever to nurture a sense of community and connection with our students. Grounded in student autonomy and choice, a remote book club can help students feel a sense of control during this time of uncertainty, build reading into their daily routines, and make meaningful connections with each other through an exploration of literature. Use this guide thoughtfully and creatively and adapt the suggestions as circumstances require.

Goals of Facing History Book Clubs

- Encourage community and connectedness
- Practice perspective-taking and develop empathy
- Encourage autonomy and choice
- Develop students' reading identities
- Foster civil discourse
- Increase reading volume and cultivate a passion for literature



Core Principles

One of the most important things you can do to support your students' learning from home is to make sure that they are reading each day. While setting up book clubs for remote learning will require some extra effort and creativity, the same core principles that guide in-person student book clubs hold true: book clubs are opportunities for student-centered, student-driven learning. Regardless of how you adapt and implement the suggestions and resources in this guide, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- 1. Provide Student Choice:** Let students, with their groups, choose what they read and have autonomy over what they talk about and when they meet.
- 2. Set Daily Reading Goals:** Encourage students to set a goal of reading 30 minutes each day. If that is a challenge, they can try starting with 15 minutes and increasing a bit each week.

3. **Keep Group Size Manageable:** Create groups of 2–4 students. Larger groups may struggle to coordinate schedules and have a hard time facilitating virtual discussions.
4. **Support Regular Club Meetings:** Let clubs determine *how* they will meet (through video, chat, email, or text). They may need to experiment before they figure out what works best. What’s most important is that they meet regularly, perhaps twice a week, for 20–30 minute sessions for 3–4 weeks.
5. **Prioritize Engagement with Books and Each Other:** Similar to adult book clubs, students shouldn’t have to maintain daily reading logs or write book reports. The goal of book clubs is to (re)ignite a love of reading and foster community around literature.

This current moment presents unprecedented challenges for teachers, and it may be impossible to implement all of these recommendations. But if students are at home reading daily and connecting once or twice a week with their peers to talk about books (and life), it can be a wonderful and positive addition to their day!

Get Started: Accessing Books

Two guiding principles of student book clubs are **choice** and **autonomy**. This moment presents a unique opportunity for students to immerse themselves in books that excite them and share that excitement with their peers. Choosing books that will appeal to your students is an essential step in creating successful book clubs.

One of the biggest hurdles to setting up remote book clubs is getting students copies of the books. It can be challenging to find books that are appealing to students, suitable for book club activities, and readily available to students at home. Your school librarian, local librarian, and resource specialist might be able to help you address this challenge.

Identify Titles That Speak to Students' Identities and Interests

Use the following resources to identify titles that will appeal to a wide variety of student backgrounds and interests:

- **We Need Diverse Books** has curated resources for authors, publishers, librarians, educators, parents, and caregivers to support reading and writing during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Follow **@Project LIT Community** and **#ProjectLITBookClub** on Twitter to join their conversation around literacy and see their curated list of YA recommendations.
- **Booklist**, **Kirkus Reviews**, **Publishers Weekly**, **School Library Journal**, and the **Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)**
- Seattle Public Library's **#Ownvoices YA Favorites** hosts a curated list of popular titles about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group.
- #DisruptTexts' blog **Disrupting Genre** includes ideas for resources you can consult for literature representing marginalized and underrepresented individuals.
- Carol Jago, a former ELA teacher and current associate director of the California Reading and Literature Project at UCLA, curated a **list of recommendations** for classroom libraries.
- **Well-Read Black Girl**, a book club dedicated to black women writers, publishes their **reading list** of both adult and YA titles.
- NCTE's **Build Your Stack** organizes titles by theme and grade level.
- The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's **reading list** includes a range of curated titles, including **100 young adult titles**.

Get Books into the Hands of Students

Once you have a list of books in mind, you will need to make them available to students. Synchronizing which titles you want to suggest and which are accessible to your students may be challenging. You might begin by polling your students to see if some already have access to books that are suitable for a book club. If not, there are a variety of options to explore for getting books to students.

Accessing ebooks through public libraries. Some students have access to books at home or the resources to purchase them online, while others do not, and many local libraries have closed. Students who have a library card and device to read on can borrow ebooks from their local library, even if their branch has closed. Students who don't have library cards should still be able to register online for an eCard. This will give them access to books, videos, magazines, and newspapers using free apps like [Hoopla](#), [OverDrive](#) or [Libby by OverDrive](#). Look for information about accessing ebooks on your library's website.

Exploring the public domain. In addition to the library, students can access public domain books for free on the following websites: [Project Gutenberg](#), [Digital Public Library of America](#), [Open Library](#), [Google Books](#), and [Feedbooks](#). Internet Archive, a nonprofit digital library, has a new [Universal School Library](#) with a growing collection of digitized books. The collection is designed using principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as central to the curatorial approach.

Accessing trade books online. [Scribd Read Free](#) has been offering free 30-day access to its library of over 1 million ebooks, audiobooks, and magazines, no credit card required. Epic!, a digital lending library with over 40,000 titles for children ages 12 and under, is providing free remote teacher and student access through June 30, 2020. Finally, EL Education created a [Remote Learning Support: Trade Book Guidance](#) page on their website with information about trade publications online, including publishers granting limited open access to their content during the COVID-19 crisis.

Opting for audiobooks. For students who benefit from audio support, [Audible Stories](#) is offering a collection of books in six languages for free while schools are closed. [SYNC](#) is a free summer audiobook program, which launches on May 1 for teens 13 and older. SYNC 2020 will use Sora, the student reading app from OverDrive.

Questions to Consider: Get Started

1. How many of my students have a book at home that they want to read?
2. How many of my students have a public library card?
3. How many of my students need physical books because they can't access ebooks at home? How can I help them get copies of their books?
4. How many of my students need accommodations (audiobooks, enlarged font, extended time)? How can I ensure that they receive them?
5. Whom at my school can I collaborate with to address these questions (e.g., co-teacher, planning partner, department chair, resource specialist, school or local librarian)?

Generate Excitement and Form Groups

Begin by providing students the list of titles you have curated. It may be important, especially for students who are not regular readers, to preview the titles so that they can make an informed choice. You might tease a few books by reading the first paragraphs, pages, or even a chapter aloud to the class (live or on a short video). You can also conduct short book talks or share book trailers of high-interest books.

The following resources can help you generate excitement for book clubs:

- We Need Diverse Books has a free [Booktalking Kit](#) for educators, which includes brief summaries of a curated list of lesser-known children's, middle grade, and YA books about diverse characters and by diverse authors.
- Scholastic, YouTube, SchoolTube, and other websites can be good sources for “book trailers” for specific titles.
- In 2019, the *School Library Journal* released a curated list of [8 YA BookTubers to Watch Right Now](#).

You might also partner with students, having them share their favorite books by writing short reviews and posting them to a Book Club Padlet or creating a video of a book talk that they post to a class Flipgrid or Google Doc.

Create Book Club Groups

After students have been introduced to a number of titles, they can self-select into groups, or you can create groups of 2–4 students. While it is powerful when students can come together around a single book, discussing a topic or theme across different titles also provides a meaningful book club experience.

Remember, at the end of the day, the goal is for students to read, talk about books, connect with one another, and foster community around stories!

Once everyone has a book, communicate how and how often your students should meet in their book clubs and make sure everyone has access to the necessary technology. When suggesting one or more technology platforms, take into account your district's or school's policy and seek parent or guardian permission as needed, especially for younger students.



If it's too challenging to organize groups around single titles, consider . . .

- Genre book clubs (fiction, sci-fi, nonfiction, graphic novel, historical fiction)
- Author book clubs (Elizabeth Acevedo, Samira Ahmed, Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, Jason Reynolds, Renée Watson, Gene Luen Yang, Ibi Zoboi, . . .)
- Thematic book clubs (coming-of-age, overcoming obstacles, LGBTQ+, immigration, banned books, realistic fiction)

. . . where students in each book club read and discuss different, but related, titles.

Consider the following options for book club meetings:

- Online video chat (Google Hangouts, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom)
- Online written discussion (shared Google Doc)
- Online chat (text message, Google Hangouts, social media)
- Phone call (for pairs)

Share How Students Will Communicate Their Learning

The focus of book clubs should be reading for pleasure and connecting over books, not assessment. Nevertheless, it is important that students are accountable for reading everyday and participating in their book club meetings. You can ask each student to check in on a weekly basis to report their attendance to book club meetings, update their reading progress, share something interesting from their last book club discussion, and communicate any issues they are having with their technology.

Additional suggestions for how students can reflect on their reading process and book club participation include:

- Reflect in journals, email, blogs, a Padlet, or Flipgrid video about one or more of the following questions:
 - What was a book club highlight this week? It might be something you read or something that happened in your meeting.
 - What was challenging about book club this week? What steps can you take to overcome this challenge next week? How can your teacher support you?
 - Who are you as a reader? What do you like to read? When? Where? What is your favorite book? Favorite genre? Favorite author?
 - What do you want to read next? What excites you about this book?
- Blog about their books. Blogs allow students to upload digital texts like photos, video clips, and articles about their books. They can create and share their blogs on platforms like Padlet, Kidblog, Edublogs, and Flipgrid, or on a shared Google Doc.
- Post book reviews on a Padlet to help classmates choose their next books or prepare a book talk, teaser, or trailer to share with the class in a whole-class online meeting, Edublogs, Google Doc, or Flipgrid.

Questions to Consider: Generate Excitement and Form Groups

1. How do the books I recommend reflect the identities and experiences of my students?
2. How will I get students excited for book clubs?
3. Which students on my roster will need extra support—email, text, or video check-ins—to help them choose and get a hold of their books?
4. How will I think about differentiation? What support can I provide my English Learners and students with accommodations?
5. How will I hold students accountable in a way that encourages meaningful reflection?
6. How can students share what they are reading and discussing with their classmates?

Plan the First Meeting: Contracts and Schedules

Once students are organized into their book clubs, it's time for them to take over the process! One way for groups to foster community and get organized is to spend their first meeting creating contracts and schedules.

1. Establish norms and create a contract

The first time students meet in their book clubs, they can **create a contract** to establish norms for discussions and participation. They can also choose a **group name, motto, and design** a shield as a way to establish their collective identity. After creating their contracts, book clubs can share them with you along with a reflection about the process. This could happen via email, on a shared Google Doc, or in a small-group or breakout video meeting.

2. Create a reading and meeting schedule

Since students are learning from home, it will help them organize their time if they create a book club **reading and meeting schedule**, which they can then share with their teacher.

Questions to Consider: The First Meeting

1. For how many weeks and how often should book clubs meet?
 2. How will book clubs share their calendars and contracts with me?
 3. What technology will they use for their meetings? Which students on my roster will need tech support?
 4. How will I check in with individuals and groups to see how book clubs are going?
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Support Groups: Student Handouts

Remote book clubs present a unique challenge because you will not be present in the room to offer support as needed. The following handouts are designed to provide some of this support so that groups can facilitate their remote book club discussions autonomously. Handouts are available as shareable Google Docs/Slides and as PDFs. Keep it fun and engaging by using these handouts judiciously.

Community-Building and Creating a Schedule

- [Create a Book Club Contract](#)
- [What Are We All About?](#)
- [Get Organized! Make a Book Club Schedule](#)
- [Book Club Meeting and Reading Calendar](#)

Establish Routines and Facilitate Discussions

- [Taking Charge of the Discussion](#)
- [Routines for Getting Started and Wrapping Up](#)

Suggestions for Book Club Discussions and Activities

- [Compelling Questions for Book Club Discussions](#)
- [Keep the Discussion Alive!](#)
- [Map the Internal World of a Character](#)
- [It's All about Perspective](#)

Inspire Students to Pursue an Interest on their Own

- [Inhabiting the World of the Book](#)

Questions to Consider: Support Groups

1. How prepared are my students to facilitate their own book club discussions?
 2. What reading and discussion skills have they learned this year that I can remind them to practice during their book club meetings?
 3. How will I make handouts available to students in a way that preserves their autonomy and doesn't overwhelm them?
 4. Which handouts do I need to modify so they are appropriate for my context?
 5. How will I check in with individual students and groups to see how their discussions are going and to understand what they need?
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