

BOOK CLUB

Overview

As I mention elsewhere on this website, reading is neither as easy as it seems like it should be, nor is it as impossible to get better at it as a lot of mediocre readers think. You can get better by *practicing* reading for one thing. You can also improve your reading by thinking about how you read, by figuring out what you can do to improve the quality of your reading, and by making connections between talking about what you read and writing about what you read. Becoming a better reader will also help you become a better writer. Book club will give you experience in these kinds of practices that good readers engage in.

Book Club is about the long haul. At some point in your college and life careers you'll have to read something long that takes some time to do and is maybe not what you would pick up to read in your spare time. That's what book club is designed to help you do.

What? Did you think I was going to give you some speech about the joy of reading? I admit: I love to read. I could spend entire days reading if I had endless free time. But I know that most people are not that way. Do I think that you can learn to enjoy reading certain books? Yes. Do I hope you'll enjoy the book you read for this class? Absolutely. But I'm not counting on it. My *job* is to help you read, remember, and usefully write about a book *even when you are not interested in it*. Reality is, you will have to read very difficult texts that you do not enjoy all the time throughout your college career. The goal of book club is to teach you how to successfully do that.

Welcome to book club.

Details. You will be evaluated on your **attendance** and **effort** during book club meetings, the quality of your book club journals, and your final projects. You will be placed into groups and in the first week of class I will ask you to pick what book you want (I use the term "pick" loosely) from the list below. You'll meet with your book club leader once a week for the first time beginning the week of **9/8** and every week from then on out through the week of **11/17**.

HOW TO DO BOOK CLUB

1. **Forming Groups, Picking Texts.** During the first days of class, you will get into groups and select your texts from the books listed below. You will need to choose your text *as a group*. Each group will pick a number that determines the order of which group gets to pick first, second, etc. I tell you this because no two groups will read the same book, and you may not get to read your first choice. Sorry. That's life.

2. **Where/When Book Clubs meet.** As I say here and elsewhere, Book Club is one of the activities you will participate in in order to earn your 1 credit for ENGL 144. That means that you will meet during the class period your ENGL144 book club group is scheduled for. Book clubs will start the week of 9/8. They meet in various rooms throughout campus which I will assign to you. Please **DO NOT** Follow the room assignment currently listed on your schedule for ENGL144. I will assign you to a book club day and provide you with the room location. This part can seem confusing at first, but after that first week it will become routine.

3. **Read the Book.** And I mean it. Read the book on your own time, a little at a time. Figure out during your first book club meeting how many pages you should be reading per week. Add up the pages of the book and divide it by the number of book club meetings you have. You should be done reading the book by the week of 11/17. **Do not be that person that lets your entire group down by not reading.**

4. **Write a Book Club Journal.** At the start of each book club, you'll have the chance to reflect on your reading in writing. **Your book club journals will be responses to prompts given by your facilitator that you compose in the Google Doc book club journal I have set up for you. These are located within the group discussion boards in your ENGL144 blackboard course. Each Group has its own section in the Blackboard ENGL144 site. Within each group is a discussion board. The first forum is Google Doc Book Club Journal links.** For the first entry you will see the template I have set up that you can fill in. You can then do the same format each week. Your fellow group members, facilitator, and myself will all have access to your journals so please keep this in mind as you write. This will also help generate conversation in your group discussions.

I will read them and give you comments on them using the Google Doc comment feature. When you get those comments back, you can respond to them in the *next* journal you write or using the comments function as well.. You can also use my comments to help you talk about the book in book club.

5. **Talk about the Book.** After you are done writing your journals, you will have some time to talk about the book. I would suggest starting the book clubs by reading your journals out loud to each other. That will get things started. Another thing you could do, as I say above, is read my comments out loud to each other. And the added bonus there is that it will kill time because it will take awhile for you to figure out my handwriting. You can also talk about what is confusing to you. You can talk about what is funny or sad or scary or interesting or boring in the book. Just, you know, talk about the book. It might feel weird at first, but you can do it.

NOTE: Your facilitator is NOT there to lecture. They just want to help you talk about the book. They've given up their time to work with you. They want you to succeed. So I mean it: *be nice to them*. And, more than that, be a fun and interesting part of their day, for crying out loud. Make them want to do this another semester. Make them look forward to meeting you each week. Make them happy that they gave up their lunch break to read and talk about a book with you.

WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED WITH THE BOOK

1. *First, write a book club journal reflection.* During the book club meeting when you are all done with the book, write a reflection on the experience. Write about all of the following

How did writing about the book in the journal help or not help you to read better?

How did talking about the book with others in the book club help or not help you to read better?

How did doing a little research about parts of your book help or not help you to read better?

Did you learn anything about how you might read other books for other classes from doing this project?

In the end, what did you think of your book?

2. *Project Time.* The project will be completed in our 101E class. We will talk about it after book club ends.

ONE MORE THING

Participation in book club is one of the ways you will earn your one credit in ENGL144. And so, in the interest of making sure this is perfectly clear, I will now repeat the attendance policy as it appears in the Policies for this course (please note, in particular, the bolded portions of the passage):

Attendance: What happens in class each day only works if everyone is here to participate as much as possible; therefore, I suggest you attend class. I can also tell you that those who attend book club and writing fellow always earn higher grades in 101 because they are more prepared and produce higher quality writing from working with their facilitators and fellows. **You have three absences in ENGL144 to use as you wish whether you want a day off to have fun or because you are sick. However you should plan wisely. Your final grade will go down 1/3 of a letter grade for every absence over 3. You may fail the course after 6 absences. Attendance in 101 and 144 is counted separately.**

ABOUT ENGL144 AS IT RELATES TO THE ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR 101: As mentioned earlier, you've been given placement in ENGL144, a one-credit support course for this and your other classes. ENGL144 consists of work done weekly in Book Club and meetings with a writing fellow attached to this course. Attendance at these weekly activities is mandatory for passing ENGL144 and failure to do so will adversely affect your success in ENGL101. I will receive weekly attendance and progress reports on both activities. You cannot pass 101E without passing 144 and vice versa. Thus:

- The attendance policy described above applies to the writing conferences you will schedule with your Writing Fellow: missing a writing conference counts as missing a class.
- The attendance policy applies to the book club meetings scheduled directly after this class: missing book club counts as missing a class.

Book Club Books for Fall 25

AY 2025-2026 Enhanced ENGL 101/144 Book Club Selections

FICTION

1. **Erdrich, Louise. *The Sentence: A Novel*. Harper Perennial (Sept 2022)**
ISBN-13 : 978-0062671134

Louise Erdrich's latest novel, *The Sentence*, asks what we owe to the living, the dead, to the reader and to the book. A small independent bookstore in Minneapolis is haunted from November 2019 to November 2020 by the store's most annoying customer. Flora dies on All Souls' Day, but she simply won't leave the store. Toookie, who has landed a job selling books after years of incarceration that she survived by reading "with murderous attention," must solve the mystery of this haunting while at the same time trying to understand all that occurs in Minneapolis during a year of grief, astonishment, isolation, and furious reckoning.

The Sentence begins on All Souls' Day 2019 and ends on All Souls' Day 2020. Its mystery and proliferating ghost stories during this one year propel a narrative as rich, emotional, and profound as anything Louise Erdrich has written.

2. McBride, James. *The Heaven and Earth Grocery Store* . Random House (August 2023) ISBN-13 : 978-0593422946 (hardcover)

In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new development, the last thing they expected to find was a skeleton at the bottom of a well. Who the skeleton was and how it got there were two of the long-held secrets kept by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side and shared ambitions and sorrows. Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Moshe integrated his theater and where Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store. When the state came looking for a deaf boy to institutionalize him, it was Chona and Nate Timblin, the Black janitor at Moshe's theater and the unofficial leader of the Black community on Chicken Hill, who worked together to keep the boy safe.

As these characters' stories overlap and deepen, it becomes clear how much the people who live on the margins of white, Christian America struggle and what they must do to survive. When the truth is finally revealed about what happened on Chicken Hill and the part the town's white establishment played in it, McBride shows us that even in dark times, it is love and community—heaven and earth—that sustain us.

3. Ko, Lisa. *The Leavers*. Algonquin Books. (April 24, 2018) ISBN-13 : 978-1616208042

A National Book Award Finalist. One morning, Deming Guo's mother, Polly, an undocumented Chinese immigrant, goes to her job at a nail salon—and never comes home. No one can find any trace of her.

With his mother gone, eleven-year-old Deming is left mystified and bereft. Eventually adopted by a pair of well-meaning white professors, Deming is moved from the Bronx to a small town upstate and renamed Daniel Wilkinson. But far from all he's ever known, Daniel struggles to reconcile his adoptive parents' desire that he assimilate with his memories of his mother and the community he left behind.

Told from the perspective of both Daniel—as he grows into a directionless young man—and Polly, Ko's novel gives us one of fiction's most singular mothers. Loving and selfish, determined and frightened, Polly is forced to make one heartwrenching choice after another. Set in New York and China

4. Mayr, Suzette. *The Sleeping Car Porter*. Coach House Books. (2022) ISBN-13 : 978-1552454589

Baxter's name isn't George. But it's 1929, and Baxter is lucky enough, as a Black man, to have a job as a sleeping car porter on a train that crisscrosses the country. So when the passengers call him George, he has to just smile and nod and act invisible. What he really wants is to go to dentistry school, but he'll have to save up a lot of nickel and dime tips to get there, so he puts up with "George."

On this particular trip out west, the passengers are more unruly than usual, especially when the train is stalled for two extra days; their secrets start to leak out and blur with the sleep-deprivation hallucinations Baxter is having. When he finds a naughty postcard of two queer men, Baxter's memories and longings are reawakened; keeping it puts his job in peril, but he can't part with the postcard or his thoughts of Edwin Drew, Porter Instructor.

**5. Wood, Monica *How To Read A Book: A Novel*. Mariner Books. (2024)
Hardcover ISBN-13 : 978-0063243675**

Violet Powell, a twenty-two-year-old from rural Abbott Falls, Maine, is being released from prison after serving twenty-two months for a drunk-driving crash that killed a local kindergarten teacher.

Harriet Larson, a retired English teacher who runs the prison book club, is facing the unsettling prospect of an empty nest.

Frank Daigle, a retired machinist, hasn't yet come to grips with the complications of his marriage to the woman Violet killed.

When the three encounter each other one morning in a bookstore in Portland—Violet to buy the novel she was reading in the prison book club before her release, Harriet to choose the next title for the women who remain, and Frank to dispatch his duties as the store handyman—their lives begin to intersect in transformative ways.