

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 **1/29** and every week from then on out through the week of **11/20**.

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 9/18 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 4/8. 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 one absence 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 1. You may fail the course after 3 absences. Attendance in 101 and 144 is counted separately. Attendance counts in both face to face and zoom meetings (in the instance of online class).**

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. Attendance counts in both face to face and Zoom meetings (in the instance of online class). 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 Spring 2024

AY 2023-2024 Enhanced ENGL 101/144 Book Club Selections

FICTION

1. Emerson, Ramona. *Shutter*. Soho Crime. (April 25, 2023)

ISBN-13 : 978-1641294812

This blood-chilling debut set in New Mexico's Navajo Nation is equal parts gripping crime thriller, supernatural horror, and poignant portrayal of coming of age on the reservation.

Rita Todacheene is a forensic photographer working for the Albuquerque police force. Her excellent photography skills have cracked many cases—she is almost supernaturally good at capturing

details. In fact, Rita has been hiding a secret: she sees the ghosts of crime victims who point her toward the clues that other investigators overlook.

As a lone portal back to the living for traumatized spirits, Rita is terrorized by nagging ghosts who won't let her sleep and who sabotage her personal life. Her taboo and psychologically harrowing ability was what drove her away from the Navajo reservation, where she was raised by her grandmother. It has isolated her from friends and gotten her in trouble with the law.

And now it might be what gets her killed.

2. Laila, Lalami. *The Other Americans* Vintage; Reprint edition (March 17, 2020)

ISBN-13: 978-0525436034 Paperback

Late one night, Driss Guerraoui—father, husband, business owner, Moroccan immigrant—is hit and killed by a speeding car. The aftermath of his death brings together a diverse cast of characters: Guerraoui's daughter Nora, a jazz composer returning to the small town in the Mojave she thought she'd left for good; her mother, Maryam, who still pines for her life in the old country; Efraín, an undocumented witness whose fear of deportation prevents him from coming forward; Jeremy, an old friend of Nora's and an Iraqi War veteran; Coleman, a detective who is slowly discovering her son's secrets; Anderson, a neighbor trying to reconnect with his family; and the murdered man himself. As the characters tell their stories, connections among them emerge. *The Other Americans* is at once a family saga, a murder mystery, and a love story informed by the treacherous fault lines of American culture.

3. Whitehead, Colson. *The Nickel Boys*. Anchor. (June 30, 2020)

ISBN-13 : 978-0345804341

Pulitzer Prize Winner. When Elwood Curtis, a black boy growing up in 1960s Tallahassee, is unfairly sentenced to a juvenile reformatory called the Nickel Academy, he finds himself trapped in a grotesque chamber of horrors. Elwood's only salvation is his friendship with fellow "delinquent" Turner, which deepens despite Turner's conviction that Elwood is hopelessly naive, that the world is crooked, and that the only way to survive is to scheme and avoid trouble. As life at the Academy becomes ever more perilous, the tension between Elwood's ideals and Turner's skepticism leads to a decision whose repercussions will echo down the decades.

Based on the real story of a reform school that operated for 111 years and warped the lives of thousands of children

4. Onyebuchi, Tochi. *Riot Baby*. Tordotcom; Reprint edition (2020)

ISBN-13: 978-1250214751 Hardcover.

Ella has a Thing. She sees a classmate grow up to become a caring nurse. A neighbor's son murdered in a drive-by shooting. Things that haven't happened yet. Kev, born while Los Angeles burned around them, wants to protect his sister from a power that could destroy her. But when Kev is incarcerated, Ella must decide what it means to watch her brother suffer while holding the ability to wreck cities in her hands. Ella and Kev are both shockingly human and immeasurably powerful. Their childhoods are defined and destroyed by racism. Their futures might alter the world.

Rooted in the hope that can live in anger, *Riot Baby* is as much an intimate family story as a global dystopian narrative. It burns fearlessly toward revolution and has quietly devastating things to say about love, fury, and the black American experience.

5. 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