

Questions for Reading Groups



These questions were developed in conversation with experienced facilitators who support reading groups in different kinds of settings and with different kinds of readers. Please feel free to pick the questions you think might work with your group.

The questions are based on the idea that book groups offer a special kind of opportunity to exchange knowledge and ideas about the world, in conversation both with the book and with other people. They recognise and explore the knowledge and life experience readers bring to a book and invite readers in groups to examine their own and other people's positions. Novels often encourage us to pay attention to people and things that mainstream society permits or encourages us to ignore, and the questions explore whether and how novels show us things – about society, ourselves, other people – that otherwise tend to be hidden.

Most questions are framed to elicit answers that go beyond 'yes' or 'no' – but feel free to frame them in the way that seems best to you, for your reading group.

Opening questions

What did you think of the book?

Did the book bring anything to the table that you hadn't thought about before?

Questions exploring personal responses, positive and negative

How did it make you feel? Do you know what it was that made you feel that way?

Which aspects of the book chime with you or ring a bell? Which scenes, situations or characters feel familiar?

Which aspects of the book put you off, or bother you?

Were there things you felt you just didn't get? What were they?

Are there things you've experienced in your life that helped you understand this book?

Did the book make you feel seen, or recognised somehow? Does it give words or a shape to things you've experienced?

Does the book make you feel more alive or excited?

Questions exploring responses that go beyond 'me'

Did the book take you into the lives of people you wouldn't normally meet?

Which of the characters are the kind of people who'd be seen and heard in the world you live in; and which characters are the kind of people who normally wouldn't be?

Can you describe any insights the book gave you into what it's like to be someone whose life experience is different from yours?

Did you come across things you'd like to find out more about? Or that you wish you'd known before?

What, if anything, do you feel you learned from the book?

How did it challenge or change the way you see the world?

Did it make you feel like you'd like or need to change anything?

Questions exploring how writers tell stories

Is the book funny? How is it funny?

- Does the humour make you feel uncomfortable? Why?
- Is it kind or unkind humour?
- Is it subversive? How?

Is the story told 'straight', from beginning to end (linear storytelling), or has the writer worked creatively with time? If yes, what's the effect of non-linear time in the story (does the past e.g. speak to the present, or the present to the future)?

Does the story play in different places/spaces, and if so, what does that add?

Does the book tell a story mainly from one character's perspective, or are there a few perspectives? If there are a few perspectives, do they agree or disagree?

Did any of the characters' perspectives mean more to you than others? Why?

Did any of them see the world in ways that were new to you or surprised you? How?

Did you find that any of the characters needed to learn? What did they need to learn?

If they didn't know important things, was it their fault? Why (not)?

Did it seem to you that any perspectives were left out?