

Creating a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club

Whether you are starting a new club or are an experienced book & film club member or leader, you will find the following hints and tips helpful.

Planning a Masterpiece Book & Film Club

- **Decide on a format.** Will members watch the film or parts of the film at the meeting (using video, DVD, or online streaming, available for a limited time after broadcast) or at home? Will there be a designated leader (such as the librarian) or rotating leaders? Will someone initiate the discussion with a brief presentation about the title, author, filmmaker, etc.; ask a set number of questions; or will the discussion be more free flowing?
- **Decide how big the group should be.** Most successful discussion groups have approximately 8–12 members. Limiting the number of participants ensures that everyone will have an opportunity to participate each time you meet.
- **Determine when and how often the group will meet.** Decide on when and often you will meet: once a month or every other month? Will you meet during the day or in the evening? Since MASTERPIECE airs on PBS, Sunday evenings at 9 pm, you may want to hold the Book & Film Club meetings on Mondays. However, since each film also streams online for a limited time after broadcast, members may be able to watch at their leisure, and meetings can be held on a day and at a time that is convenient for all. You may also purchase and/or loan DVDs for titles that have aired previously.
- **Decide how long the meetings will last.** Many discussion groups find that meeting for 60–90 minutes affords a comfortable amount of time for discussion and refreshments.
- **Decide on the book/film selection process.** Successful book & film clubs employ a variety of methods for selecting what they read and watch. Sometimes the leader, or the group, chooses according to reviews. Some groups select titles around a theme, genre, author, or book series. To tie into the excitement of the premiere of a MASTERPIECE broadcast or the rebroadcast of a favorite title, check the [MASTERPIECE website](#) for the upcoming schedule.

- **Make sure multiple copies of the book (and/or film) are available.** In order to allow enough time to read the book or watch the film in a library setting, have copies available at least four weeks before your group meets. A local bookstore may also be able to offer books and/or DVDs at a discount.
- **Make joining the club easy.** If you are a librarian, offer multiple ways for people to sign up. Post sign-up sheets online, at the circulation desk at the library, and at local businesses, schools, community centers, and so on. If you are organizing your own club, you may want to limit membership to word-of-mouth invitations or to an existing group (neighborhood listserv, school group, and so on), or you may want to extend your reach throughout the community.
- **Pick a pleasant location in which to meet.** Be sure there is adequate and comfortable space to gather. Arrange tables and chairs in a circle. Individual book & film clubs often meet at one another's homes or another easily accessible spot (library, bookstore, community center, coffeehouse, and so on).
- **Establish ground rules.** Be explicit about the group's expectations regarding punctuality, taking turns, choosing the group leader, bringing refreshments, etc. Agreeing on a common set of expectations promotes a positive and respectful discussion. You may even want to put the "rules" in writing and distribute them to the group.
- **Encourage members to attend each meeting,** whether or not they have completed the book and/or film. Talking about why you didn't start or finish the work may contribute as much as the comments of those who did.
- **Use social networking.** Create a listserv, a landing page on your library's website, or a social networking site so people can easily find out about upcoming sessions and chat further about the book or film.
- **Eat, drink, and be merry!** Food and drink help to keep the club informal and fun. A local restaurant or coffeehouse may be willing to donate all or part of the refreshments, or invite members to bring snacks. (As always, be aware of food allergies and sensitivities. Clearly mark food and drink ingredients.)

Especially for Librarians

Consider these questions to decide what kind of club is right for you and your community:

- *What goals do you hope a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club will achieve for your library?* Are you trying to offer more options for patrons, or are you trying to attract new audiences (see below)? Do you want to make your library more visible, provide benefits for a new partner organization, or capitalize on the promotion for an upcoming MASTERPIECE broadcast? Once you've defined your goals, you can map out the steps needed to attain them.
- *What library resources are available?* Consider staff time and funding; book, video, or DVD availability; meeting locations; publicity; audiovisual equipment; and so on.
- *Who is your key audience*—new patrons, existing members, young adults, students, seniors, or a combination of these groups? After you have identified the audience, you can shape your club as needed.
- *What is the focus of your club?* Is it to encourage people to read and explore new genres, titles, or authors? Is it to analyze writing styles and filmmaking techniques? Once you determine the focus, you'll be able to more easily select the right titles and format for the club.
- *What support can community partners offer?* You may be able to find funding, publicity, volunteers, participants, or donations of food and materials through local partners. Remember, you don't have to do it all alone! (See Community Partners, below.)

Innovative Ideas

Try these variations with your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club.

Launch a “Community Reads” Campaign

A “Community Reads” campaign—known by various names, including “One Book” or “The Big Read”—brings members of a city, town, or neighborhood together to read and discuss the same book at the same time. The “One Book” movement began in 1998 when Nancy Pearl, executive director of the Washington Center for the Book in the Seattle Public Library, initiated “If All Seattle Read the Same Book.” (For more information, see Resources.)

Although launching a campaign like this requires a commitment from both the library and community partners, the results can be very gratifying. Using a MASTERPIECE title can provide additional publicity and media tie-in possibilities, with your local PBS station and beyond. For detailed instructions and guidance on planning a Community Reads campaign, see the American Library Association's [“One Book, One Community”](#) guide.

Focus on Film

Rather than selecting a book-based MASTERPIECE title, you may want to hold a film-only discussion group. Members may relish talking about such beloved series as *Downton Abbey*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Foyle's War*, or *Prime Suspect*, despite the fact that there is no accompanying book. The MASTERPIECE website has many useful features, including interviews and background information, to help you develop discussion questions and activities.

Invite a Scholar

Science cafés are live—and lively—events that take place in casual settings such as pubs and coffeehouses, featuring a brief presentation by a scientist, followed by Q&A. (For more about science cafés, visit <http://www.sciencecafes.org/>.) Using the same model, invite a local author, or a scholar of literature, media studies, popular culture, drama, or film, to lead or answer questions about a particular novel, author, genre, or film.

Prepare Book & Film Club Kits

If you are a librarian and would like to cater to various book & film clubs in your community, you may want to consider putting together a Book & Film Club Kit. It could contain multiple copies of books and/or DVDs, plus background information, discussion questions, and activities. (You can download a specific [MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club Guide](#), which is ideal for this purpose.) A designated book club leader could borrow the entire kit for his or her members.

Community Partners

Partners can enhance the variety and amount of materials you offer to the group, expand the number or types of activities, and help publicize the new initiative. Partners benefit from increased exposure in the community and more business from library patrons or members of your group.

Local Government

The mayor's office, town representatives, or other local officials can assist you by helping to spread the word by endorsing your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. If you'd like to create a "Community Reads" campaign (where everyone in town reads the same book/ watches the same film at the same time—see "Community Reads Campaigns" above), you will want to enlist community leaders to join in the effort.

Media Partners

Your local PBS station may be interested in cohosting a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. Check to see if you can coordinate with any events planned for upcoming MASTERPIECE premieres. Your PBS or NPR station may also be able to do on-air promotion; link to the club via their Facebook page, Twitter feed, or blog; host a call-in radio show; provide a space for a screening or meeting; or place announcements in their publications. Other local newspaper and radio events listings can also reach a wide audience.

Schools

Many MASTERPIECE titles are already part of the middle and/or high school curriculum. Contact the school librarian or the English, drama, or media studies department about a possible collaboration. You can invite students to attend the club, help launch the initiative, or provide technological or audiovisual assistance. If you are a librarian, you may also be interested in offering a school-based club for young adults. Colleges and universities may be interested in cosponsoring a club or may be able to offer professors and/or graduate students as guest speakers or to help facilitate meetings. Be sure to pre-screen films to make sure they are appropriate for younger audiences.

Chamber of Commerce/Local Businesses

Local businesses can be a great resource for your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. A printing/copy shop might be willing to produce flyers or posters. A grocery store or coffee shop may donate refreshments. A bookstore may be willing to copresent the club. Businesses can post flyers or provide meeting space. Meet with local vendors and make a presentation about your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club, the kinds of services you need, and what benefits a partnership could bring.

Continuing Education Courses

Your town may offer courses for adults and/or seniors. You may want to collaborate by offering your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club through this venue.

Historical Society or Museum

The local historical society or museum may be able to infuse local history into your discussions. For instance, if you are exploring *Our Town*, *Great Expectations*, or *The Diary of Anne Frank*, compare the descriptions of life in small-town 20th-century America, Victorian England, or World War II-era Europe with what was happening in your town at that time.

Local Drama or Theatre Group

A local drama or theatre group may be interested in being part of a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. Members can offer insights from the perspective of an actor, director, or playwright. It may even be possible to coordinate your club with a local production of a related play.

Faith-based Institutions

Local churches, synagogues, and mosques may be interested in hosting a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club or providing space for the club and encouraging their members to join.

Senior Centers/Assisted-Living Facilities

The activities director at a senior center or assisted-living facility may be interested in cohosting the club. Reach out to whoever is in charge of programming.

Working with Partners

You may or may not have worked with partners before. These tips will help you avoid pitfalls and have a successful relationship with your partners.

- Be specific about what the project is, the kind of help you would like, and what you are offering in return, such as greater exposure in the community, an enhanced reputation for the other organization, more customers, and so on. Be specific as to what you can provide, such as a company's name and/or logo on publicity materials, acknowledgment of the company or organization at each meeting, etc.
- Establish a contact person at the partner organization and determine roles and expectations about the partnership. Spelling out the specifics of the relationship with a letter of agreement or memo can clarify each party's responsibilities and avoid misunderstandings.
- Determine what and how many resources—time, money, volunteers, space, and so on—each group will contribute.
- Develop a timeline for your work together. (Note: Media partners often require a long lead-time for print and on-air promotion.)
- Look for opportunities to tie into your partners' existing events and initiatives. For instance, many towns hold street fairs, festivals, or farmers' markets in the summer or fall. Ask if you can use this event to publicize and recruit people to join your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club.


- Discuss ahead of time how you will evaluate the success of the project and your partnership.
- Check in after the club's first meeting and regularly thereafter to make sure each partner feels comfortable with the relationship and the initiative.

Publicity and Promotion

There are many ways to promote your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. The following suggestions are aimed at librarians, but can be adapted for your particular situation.

- Create and distribute flyers. Ask volunteers and/or community partners to help distribute and post the flyers around town.
- Set up an attractive display in the library using copies of the book, DVDs, videos, or tune-in information, and club sign-up sheets. In addition to the title itself, you may want to add related books—for instance, a biography of the author, a cookbook, or works that give historical background.
- Post notices online via the library's website and newsletter, partner websites and newsletters, town or city websites, neighborhood listservs, social networking sites, and local newspapers. You may want to ask your local PBS station to include information about your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club in its program guide or membership listserv.
- Encourage the local newspaper to do a feature story on the club. Invite a reporter to one of your meetings, or pitch an "angle" that may be of interest, such as your collaboration with your local PBS station, the participation of a local guest speaker, a unique theme, and so on.
- Staff a table at a book fair, arts/craft fair, or other cultural event where you can distribute flyers and talk with potential members.

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