

Book clubs are community builders with mental health benefits.

I like to call myself “a reader,” but truth be told, many would say I am not. I pale in comparison to voracious readers who can easily devour ten to twenty books plus a month. If I attempted to do that, it would be mere eye exercise, and I wouldn’t be able to share or talk about anything that my eyes glazed over.

Being [neurodivergent](#) with [ADHD](#), I will forget a character’s name from one paragraph to the next unless I underline it and write the name down on a Post-it note or the book’s back flap. Oftentimes I will go back and reread passages several times. I like to think that this extra time creates a deeper level of intimacy and is not just a way to compensate for having a wandering mind. I get to know the book as though it were a person I met who sat and told me a story. This is why I have decided to call myself “a reader,” not by the number of books I have read but by the quality of intimacy. In the words of Thomas Carlyle, “My books are friends that never fail me.”

Reading is a matter of the heart for me, and I know I am not alone; that is why we have book clubs with different types of readers, reading styles, and tastes. One of the things I love about a book club is that I am not reading a wonderful work of literature or an insightful commentary on society that I will pocket away in my mind and try to recruit others to read. The club is agreeing ahead of time on the friend/book we will meet and talk with and come together and discuss. My friendship circle expands. Author bell hooks describes the power and beauty of book clubs in *All About Love: New Visions*.

“For most people, what is so painful about reading is that you read something and you don’t have anybody to share it with. In part what the book club opens up is that people can read a book and then have someone else to talk about it with. They then see that a book can lead to the pleasure of conversation and that the solitary act of reading can actually be a part of the path to communion and community”.

No time better illustrated the healing benefits of book clubs than in 2020 when in the wake of George Floyd there was an increased interest in books on social justice. These suggested lists of books inspired the formation of [The Black Book Chat](#) founded by Dr. Natalie Graham on Instagram on the second Saturday of the month from 10-11:30 AM.

In a recent interview, [Dr. Graham](#) said she wanted to make sure that the lists didn’t remain suggestions. With Black Book Chat approaching its third-year anniversary, the mission of the club has evolved to include reading the works of Black prominent and up-and-coming writers. The works of James Baldwin, Octavia Butler, Jesmyn Ward, and Toni Morrison are just a few of the authors; Audre Lorde is on the summer reading list.

Not only do book clubs provide opportunities for community building but also for meeting one of the primary requirements in writing. “If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read and write a lot. There’s no way around these two things...” - Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. Consistent participation in one or more book clubs is one way to

maintain accountability in scheduling time to read. Writing is a responsive act; we write in response to our ideas, environment, and what we read.

I began this article by sharing that I have ADHD but love to read. According to WebMD there are [mental health benefits to reading](#) as well. It can help reduce stress and anxiety and helps battle mental decline and dementia as you age.

Book clubs are responsive, community-building opportunities with built-in accountability and health benefits. If you have been playing with the idea of starting a book club, or maybe you are already in one or more, like me, the site [I Love Libraries For Book Lovers Book Clubs](#) is an excellent source with information and suggestions that will guide you towards a successful enriching experience.

If you have ADHD, here is one of many sites with strategies to help you on your reading journey [PsychCentral](#).

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