

book | bok | noun

1. > a collection of paper, parchment or other material with text or pictures between two covers and bound together along one edge within covers
2. > the print that binds the GGs one night a month for as long as the wine lasts

.. section 1 ..

# books

*This book is our story.* It's the story of the Giller Girls, better known as the GGs. We started what we thought would be an ordinary book club, but our ordinary book club has evolved into so much more.

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# beginnings: our book club story

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In this chapter, you'll read the story of how we, the GGs, started our book club. From very humble beginnings and a questionable first book selection, we established the foundation for a lasting tradition – the GG Book Club.



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# beginnings

**in the beginning** | How the founding members of the GG Book Club came together despite some unlikely circumstances.

**B**efore we jump into how we formed and grew our book club, it's important for us to tell you what kind of book club we created. As you'll read in the pages that follow we're not your ordinary book club. Countless times we catch ourselves telling others how much we love our book club and reflecting on the fabulous times we've had together. Being in the company of our GG book club sisters inspires us, whether it's while discussing the latest book selection or participating in one of our infamous getaways. The connections that we've forged through our book club year after year are something that we really want to share with others. Although none of us is an author in her own right, what better way to share than by telling our story.

Our meetings breed creativity, but never competition, from the food served to the books selected. There's an unconditional acceptance of who you are. It's never about one-upmanship. It's a relaxed environment where you can be as enthusiastic as you want to be on just about any topic.

It's about one place (where we gather usually once a month) where you are never judged. And what happens at book club stays at book club. This book is a stimulant, to help other women get started on their own personal journey.

“It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as the confidence of their help when in need.” —*Epicurus (341-270 BC)*



## > from the start

Our book club grew out of very humble beginnings and, in retrospect, it's amazing that it ever started at all. Truth be told, the genesis of the GG Book Club was in a hockey arena. For several years, three couples held season tickets for our local hockey team's games. It was a good excuse to get out of the house. It certainly wasn't the hockey that brought the women out on those cold winter nights, but rather the camaraderie of good friends getting together on a regular basis. The reluctance to disappoint each other kept the women coming back. While the men watched the game, the women, along with half-hearted attempts to follow the action on the ice, bonded.

As each season drew to a close, the women talked about finding something else besides our hockey tickets as our “excuse” for getting out of the house. One of us kept suggesting we start a book group, but the idea needed some help to come to life. When the group finally decided to let their season tickets lapse, the thought of missing what had come to be a special time together loomed ominously. This reality galvanized us into action, and gave us the motivation to form the Giller Girl Book Club, what has affectionately come to be referred to as the GG Book Club.

We knew other women who belonged to book clubs and wondered if their models might be something we should consider. We were three women with three different perspectives on what being in a book club entailed. We all agreed that we liked to read, but somehow we just never seemed to have the motivation to broaden our literary horizons or take the time to do it right. We were simply grateful when someone loaned us the latest popular book – something we could read without the effort of selecting a title or tracking it down in the maze of bookstore aisles.

## > how do you start?

In the beginning, with no rules and no formal format or protocol to follow, we, the original three women, appointed ourselves founding members. Each of us invited a friend or neighbor to a meeting to test the idea of creating a book club. We just wanted to make sure that this concept would fly. The only constraint at the time was no family members, not because



**GG members are...**

- > friends, friends of friends and neighbors.
- > voracious readers at all times of day or night
- > casual readers squeezing in the book on weekends or late nights
- > fun-loving women from a variety of interests – from athletic types to travelers to cooks (great ones, not-so-great ones and some even with kitchen phobias).



we didn't like our families, but because the point of this endeavor was to broaden our horizons and cultivate an opportunity for getting to know new people.

There was nothing formal about our initial gathering. It was just an agreement to discuss the possibility of forming a book club. As we contemplated who to invite, we didn't think it was important that everyone know each other ahead of time. What we did think was important was that each member be someone that one of us knew and respected and thought would be a great addition to the group. We were looking for women who loved to socialize. And if they liked to read books as well, then that was even better. It couldn't be simpler.

“Books, like friends, should be few and well chosen. Like friends, too, we should return to them again and again for, like true friends, they will never fail us – never cease to instruct.” —Charles Caleb Colton

So, with a small group of six, we had our starting point. It sounded simple at first, but many of us were torn between having more commitments in our lives and a night out to call our own. We all loved the idea of adding a personal dimension to our doing-for-everybody-else lifestyles, but because we honored our precious little personal time, we were naturally guarded.

We were worried about spending too much of our personal time on reading, especially if the books turned out to be dull. And the potential for having to make vain attempts at stimulating conversation about those books made us wary. Yes, even Perry, who never passes up the opportunity for socializing (she's the party girl of the group), had her doubts at first. Pat, who has become known as the pragmatic corporate woman in the group, always saw the possibilities and lent her energy to moving us forward. We had the motivation to start a book club; all we needed was to devise a formula to make it happen.

### who are the GGs?

> we are a grand assortment of friends who have known each other for a long time, and some who are meeting for the first time

> we are mothers

> we are wives, partners, sisters, aunts and daughters

> we are entrepreneurs, corporate executives, philanthropists and professionals

> we are travelers who have fun and who experience great escapades



“I was a little apprehensive about the idea of joining a book club. After many years of child-induced sleep deprivation, I stopped reading. I still remember the book on my night table unopened and never read—*Serum*. It was the last book my mother gave me before she passed away. To date, I have never read this book. Why, I am not sure. If I couldn't read for my mother, could I read for this group?” —Perry

first get-together of the GGs | Testing out the idea of a book club, but not your everyday kind of book club.

With a core group and a commitment to make this work now in place, we embarked on a journey with many firsts. Here are some of those initial forays into the world of book clubbing – from how we got started to how we selected our first book to how we reviewed future books.

### > getting together

With no books in hand, no agenda and no formalities (except for the promise of a glass of wine and appetizers), our initial group of six got together for our first discussion. None of us had previous book club experience, so we arrived at this first informal get-together with great anticipation, ready to become a part of this new adventure. We answered our first question – who would be in our group.

Scheduling meetings sounds simple and, for many, a regular day (like the first Tuesday of every month) can work out just fine. But we were a small group to start and we wanted to make sure that, as often as possible, everyone could attend every meeting. We decided that we would schedule the next get-together at the end of each meeting, and make every effort to have a meeting once a month.

There were other basic questions on getting started that we needed to answer before we could successfully get off the ground. Would we have a structured meeting format to accompany book selections? We decided we would simply write our own rules, leaving ourselves free to adapt as we went along. We also discovered that all of us were open to reading anything. Great, we had flexibility.

This led to the next question. How would we go about selecting our books? We had to open another pinot grigio – there were so many decisions to make.

### > creating structure

After lots of discussion it was unanimous: we all wanted to pursue creating our own unique book club. Besides, any reason to get out with a group of girls always gets a thumbs-up and reading a book and discussing it seemed a small price to pay. Everyone was interested in getting together at least once a month, an interval that would give us enough time to complete the book before discussing it at the meeting.

Where we got hung up was on what to read and how to select our books. We talked at length about these quandaries but met with no resolution. We had consulted with women belonging to other book clubs and found their formats either too rigid, with little flexibility; or too loose, with little hope of sustainability.

We didn't want a lengthy book-selection process, with titles being suggested and voted on, put on a list and set out for the year. That sounded too much like a school curriculum. That's not to say it isn't a process that can work for some, but we knew it wasn't going to be right for us. Still, we needed to decide how we would choose our books. Then, we had a breakthrough. Perry and Kathleen, another member who is always keen to take on new challenges, volunteered to select our first book, much to the shared relief of everyone else. Before the evening came to a close, we decided on our next host. Luckily, Kathleen volunteered her home for the next book club meeting.

We had had a fantastic time with these initial efforts, and accomplished a lot. We'd created some of our own rules, decided how and when to hold meetings, and agreed that serving appetizers and wine were a great way to start. We'd decided to discuss the length of our meetings and rotation of venue the next time we got together.

We were off to a great beginning. There was definitely something to this book club concept after all. We still needed to test the waters, but we had high hopes. The fact that not everyone knew each other, or at least not very well, gave us all the more reason to want to get together again. We were all looking forward to the next meeting and, most of all, to receiving our first book. Little did we realize what we had started that evening – a connection and bond that would grow beyond any of our expectations.

### questions to get started

Who do you include in your book club?

• How often should you meet?

• How do you select your first book?

• How long should the books be?

• How do you run a meeting?

• How long should a meeting last?

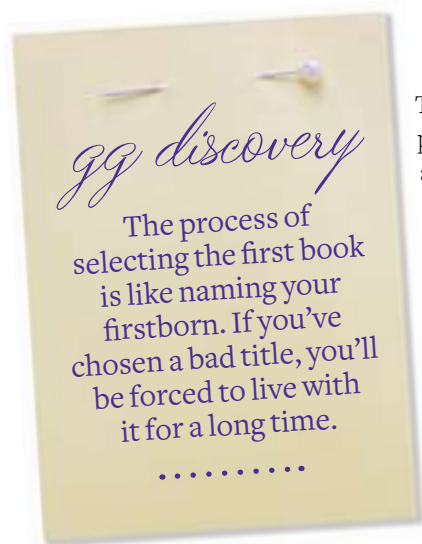
1st get-together



# selecting

selecting the first book | Who knew it could be so difficult to choose the inaugural book for our new book club?

How hard could it be to select a good book? If you think it's easy, just walk into any bookstore today without a specific title or topic in mind and look around. The selection is overwhelming. Making that first choice turned out to be a bigger responsibility than the two volunteers had expected. In fact, they were paralyzed by the decision as they walked through the maze of aisles in the biggest bookstore they could find in town. What if no one liked their book choice? Perry and Kathleen resolved this task, at least for this time, by appointing themselves to make the choice together. Clever thinking – based on safety in numbers, each girl could blame the other if the group found the read a real disappointment. In the end, after great anguish, they opted for a book by an award-winning author.



## > revolving host

The only formality for meeting number two, besides presenting the first book, was agreeing upon a host and a day for the next meeting. Before the night was finished, the six of us had established the order of hosting and, to this day, have very rarely deviated from it (except for including later members in the rotation). We also agreed that we'd keep things simple when hosting – never too fancy or with an air of competition. We had already set the standard with our first two get-togethers' simple offerings of appetizers and wine, our beverage of choice. This would be all we needed to host a meeting.

## > receiving our first book

We were all pumped for our first official book club meeting. Of course, we didn't have a book to discuss yet, so there wasn't a lot of pressure

for Kathleen, our host, to set a standard. But we developed another guiding principle for our future meetings – Perry and Kathleen suggested that the host of each meeting purchase books for all the members, just as they had done for this meeting. From this point forward, the element of surprise would always be part of our meetings. Presenting the next book at the end of each meeting, as a sort of big girl's loot bag, was a brilliant idea!

It was almost time to reveal the first book. To maintain the suspense for as long as possible, the duo gift-wrapped the book and unveiled their selection to anxious members near the end of the meeting. The first tradition of our book club was born that night.

As we had with the first, we made some progress during our second meeting. We decided how we would select our books – the host of the meeting would always make the selection and purchase a copy for each member. It's up to the host to decide when and how she would present her book choice. We also decided on size – roughly 300 pages in length, just to make sure we had a shot at finishing the book before the next meeting.

We saved the discussion about developing a meeting format until the next get-together, when we would have at least read our first book.

*PS. If a member had already read the book, we decided that it simply meant she'd have no homework and could just look forward to having fun at the next meeting. Or she might enjoy reading the book a second time.*



## book wrappings

We've developed very creative ways to wrap our books – just to maintain the suspense a little longer. It's not required, but when hosts have the time or inclination, it adds more fun to the night.

Here are a few samples:

- > *Seabiscuit* in a racing form
- > *The Glass Castle* in aluminum foil
- > *Under the Tuscan Sun* in Italian language newspaper, parcel style with red string
- > *Eat, Pray, Love* in paper secured with a string of colourful beads
- > *Tender at the Bone* in *Gourmet* magazine tear sheets
- > *The Hatbox Letters* in an old-fashioned hatbox, wrapped to mimic a letter complete with stamp



# book review

**first official book review** | Starting our journey, one meeting at a time.

Over the next few weeks, every member read their first book diligently. But the excitement waned the deeper we got into the story. Imagine the great disappointment when both Perry and Kathleen came to the same, slow realization that they had chosen an incredibly painful, depressing novel. This first book hadn't quite lived up to their expectations of grandeur. Surely, they kept thinking, it must get better. Just one more chapter, one more. Now they worried – would anyone want to continue the book club after wading through this book?



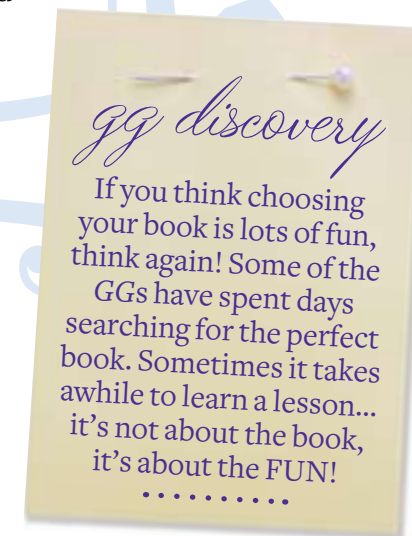
It was unanimous; no one liked the first book. But it was a critical milestone for us. We learned that it wasn't so important why we didn't like a book, but that we had established an environment comfortable enough for us to voice an opinion and discuss a book's merits. Our group was developing an easy, relaxed tone. And this, we soon realized, is what would set us apart from other book clubs.

“There are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts.” —Charles Dickens

## GG book club 10 commandments

- 1 | You are priority #1. This is your night.
- 2 | Fun is a must.
- 3 | LOL (laugh out loud) at each other and yourself.
- 4 | Digression is accepted and expected.
- 5 | Never refuse a compliment or be reluctant to offer one.
- 6 | What happens at GG Book Club stays at book club.
- 7 | Read between the wines.
- 8 | Where the boys aren't and never will be!
- 9 | Never apologize for your book selection.
- 10 | Completing the book is expected but not mandatory.

These commandments – including the ninth, a product of our experience with the first book – have evolved over the years. All in all, this list reflects the spirit and intent of the GG Book Club.



## progress on getting started questions

- ☑ Who do you include in your book club?
- 
- ☑ How often should you meet?
- 
- ☑ How do you select your first book?
- 
- ☑ How long should the books be?
- 
- ☑ How do you run a meeting?
- 
- ☑ How long should a meeting last?

### > process complete

We were on our way. We completed all of the getting-started questions. Nothing has ever been cast in concrete, though, and through the years we've learned to be flexible. We've added additional members; we don't always meet once a month; sometimes, we break the 300-page book limit, if there is a truly worthy book selection that warrants the deviation. And there is never any real structure to our meetings; flexibility is always the key.

### > evolution of the GG Book Club

We fell into a rhythm of monthly book club meetings. Just the same, we never keep to a rigid schedule. Because many of our GGs travel, it's not always possible to have everyone available on a preset night. When it comes time to pick the next meeting date, it's typical to find all of us pulling out our day planners or smartphones, or even pocket-size calendars or scraps of paper. The host typically follows up with an e-mail to ensure that no one has forgotten about the next meeting date.

How long do our meetings last? There are GGs among us who might suggest that a meeting lasts until there's no wine left! But there are no set rules on how long a meeting should go. It all depends on the conversation, the general mood and what we have planned the next day.

We always make an effort at every meeting to have a lively discussion about the most recent book we've read. Sometimes there are reader questions at the back of the selected book and this helps to get conversation started. There are also many websites that offer book club-type questions. See *sample websites in Chapter 9, "Book Club Blueprint."* Sometimes, the person who has selected the book will bring questions to the next meeting, but more often than not, we can always count on one GG to arrive with a list of questions in hand.



## meeting at a glance

- > The host provides everything for the evening.
- > A welcome bevie is provided upon arrival.
- > Catch-up chat about any topic is encouraged until everyone arrives.
- > Bites and bevies are served in any format.
- > Book discussion often includes questions from other members and is led by the book's selector (last month's host).
- > Digressions usually occur based on the interest (or lack thereof) in the book being discussed.
- > A date is selected for the next meeting.
- > A request for perhaps "just one more" digression, conversation, laugh or bevie is anticipated.
- > Lots of socializing, chatter and laughter are encouraged.
- > The next book is presented at the end of the evening.
- > Responsible driving arrangements are made.
- > Goodbyes are reluctantly exchanged.



"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Place a large glass of water and two Advil on the nightstand before leaving the house for a book club meeting." —Perry