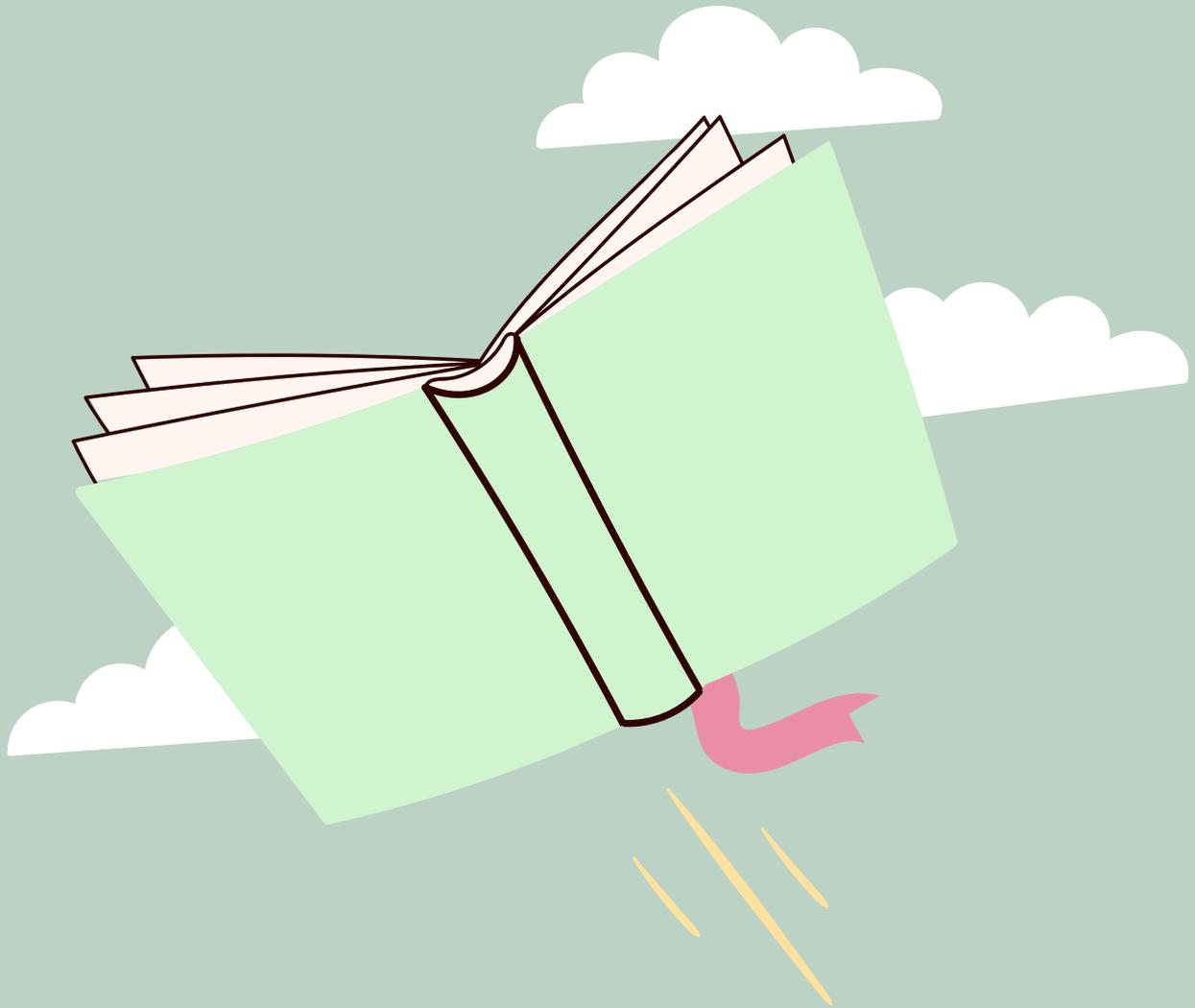


Reading4Normal Book Club

A Guide for Facilitators

Helping young people connect and explore
their everyday lives together through fiction



**Reading4Normal is supported by The University of Roehampton,
The British Academy, and The Southlands Methodist Trust.**

Reading4Normal Book Clubs

Reading4Normal Book Clubs bring together young readers from different places around the UK to discuss contemporary British young adult (YA) fiction in a programme of online reading groups. These Book Clubs provide the structure, space, and stimulus for teenagers to reflect on their own lives and connect with others in a facilitated online environment. Readers are encouraged to explore their everyday routines, relationships, and environments in relation to realistic fictional characters and stories, and to explore their responses with other young readers in live sessions. Reading4Normal is not a literacy programme: it is aimed at keen readers and is designed to offer them a temporary community and new ways to connect with each other and share experiences.

This Guide has been produced to help teachers, librarians, or youth workers set up their own Reading4Normal Book Club. The guidance has been developed from a research project called “Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19”, which was carried out by researchers at the University of Roehampton in 2020-21 and supported by The British Academy (see Appendix C). This project highlighted the benefits for teens of a reading-for-pleasure scheme that prioritises meaningful conversations with other young people from around the country.

Reading4Normal Book Clubs have been shown to help offer young readers:

- a shared sense of belonging with their generational cohort
- an understanding of authenticity and the legitimacy of their own experiences
- a feeling of short-term connection with diverse peers that complements more intense or longer-term community and friendships

Previous Reading4Normal Book Club members have described the experience as:



Running your Reading4Normal Book Club

Getting Started

- **Access or create links with other schools or youth organisations to create your Book Club**
TIP We recommend that Book Clubs are made up of three partner organisations, ideally from different geographical regions
- **Identify Leads from each partner school or organisation: they will be responsible for coordinating the Book Club**
TIP English Teachers, Librarians, and Mental Health Leads all make good Book Club Leads
- **Decide with your partners who your Book Club is for**
TIP Year 9, Year 10, and Year 12 pupils tend to have more time for 'reading for pleasure' than year groups taking exams. A Book Club for a single year group is valuable for putting participants at ease and allowing them to share common experiences; a Book Club involving participants from different year groups can be interesting as a way of exploring issues from different perspectives
- **Identify participants for your Book Club. Invite enthusiastic readers who you think might benefit from engaging with others. Plan to create a Book Club with no more than nine participants in total, ideally with equal numbers recruited from each partner school or organisation involved**
TIP It is a good idea to try and create a diverse group of readers for your Book Club, so you might like to think about the gender, ethnicity, and the background of the pupils you invite to take part
- **Agree on which YA novels you want your Book Club to read**
TIP You can follow the Reading4Normal programme listed on our website or devise your own. It can be fun to provide participants with a reading list of YA novels and ask them to vote for their top choices using the Strawpoll tool: <https://strawpoll.com/>
- **Decide on practical issues, such as which online platform to use, how participants will acquire or access books, and who will facilitate each session**
TIP Since the programme is about building connections and a feeling of belonging, think about how to avoid making your sessions feel like educational activities
TIP If you do not have the budget for buying books, you might liaise with your local library service to coordinate purchasing copies that can be borrowed by your participants
- **Set dates for your Book Club: you will need to have an initial orientation meeting and plan for a session on each of the YA novels**

Facilitating Effective Book Clubs

Reading4Normal Book Clubs prioritise building connections between teenagers from diverse geographical locations and backgrounds through the shared experience of reading contemporary British YA. To enhance the benefit teenagers get from the scheme, we recommend:

- Creating a diverse reading list, both with regards to the backgrounds of the authors and the characters depicted in the novels (we have curated an extended reading list on our website)
- Leading the Book Clubs with a gentle touch approach that allows teens to contribute freely and without judgement
- Enabling participants to have discussions that favour communication, engagement, and exploring lived experiences over practising analytical literacy skills

Safeguarding Book Club Members

Reading4Normal Book Clubs should adopt the safeguarding principles of the participating schools. We recommend particular consideration be given to:

- Ensuring the online safety of teenagers during online Book Club sessions (e.g. hosting sessions in a secure, password-protected space)
- Establishing clear guidelines regarding appropriate behaviour and operating a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment (examples of these guidelines and policies are available on our website)
- Embracing an approach to online discussion that accommodates how teens wish to participate (e.g. with or without cameras, verbal or written input)
- Encouraging teenagers to be aware of the expectations and possible challenges of the Book Club (e.g. reading and discussing novels that may contain triggering themes and content)

Core Activities

Orientation Meeting

Invite all your Book Club members to an online meeting. This is a chance for everyone to introduce themselves, and for Leads to provide information about the Reading4Normal Book Club, including guidance on how to prepare for the live sessions. You can use this initial meeting to help everyone feel comfortable with your chosen online platform. You might also use it to give an overview of the YA novels you will be reading – or to set up the voting system if you are offering a choice to your participants. It is also a chance for you to explain how participants can access the books they need to read.

YA Novel #1

Ask your Book Club members to read the first YA novel on your list. Give them plenty of time to do this reading, bearing in mind they will have other school work and commitments.

Run a live online session for your Book Club members to discuss the novel together (see Appendix A: Reading4Normal Book Club Session Plan for ideas about how to structure this).

There are guidance notes for a number of novels on the Reading4Normal website that are designed to help participants think about their responses to reading these books and how they relate to their own everyday lives. You could create your own guidance notes for other novels.

YA Novel #2+

Repeat the process for as many books and sessions as you have planned. As your Book Club members become more comfortable talking together, the facilitator can encourage them to ask each other questions and take more of a lead in the discussion.

Final Session

Plan and run a final session to give your Book Club members the opportunity to reflect on the entire programme and the impact it has had on them (see Appendix A: Reading4Normal Book Club Session Plan for ideas about how to structure this session).

Enhancement Activities

Creating a Reflective Journal

Before running your Book Club sessions, ask members to create a Reflective Journal about their everyday lives (see Appendix B for guidance notes). Encourage your Book Club members to add to their Journal with notes and passages from the novels selected for the programme, or any other reading they are doing. Although Reading4Normal is not about building skills, you might help readers recognise that note-taking can help them pay closer attention to their reading.

Running a Reading4Normal Author Event

If you have the resources to invite an author to your school or organisation, you might like to tie their visit to your Reading4Normal activities. Authors can be asked to run a workshop making connections between their own writing and ordinary life. The Book Trust has good advice on arranging an author visit. See <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/tips-and-advice/reading-in-schools/how-to-arrange-an-author-visit/>

“Projects like this... are just really important to have these connections to people and to do something you enjoy.”

Year 12 student



Appendix A

Reading4Normal Book Club Session Plan

1. Introductions

- Leads introduce themselves
- Ice-breaker – e.g. ask each participant to state preferred name, where they live, and something silly about themselves

2. Book Talk

Leads use the following framework for prompting discussion:

- Was there anything you liked about this book?
- Can you relate to the characters in the story?
- Does anything in this story remind you of anything in your own life?
 - Has anything that happens in this book ever happened to you?
 - Which parts of the book seem to you to be most true-to-life?
 - In what ways was it the same or different to your own experiences?
 - Did the book make you think differently about your own similar experience?
- How are events in this story similar to things that happen in the real world?
- How are events in this story different from things that happen in the real world?

“You can see how other people view the books that you’ve just read even though they’re on the other side of the country.”

Year 10 student

3. Concluding Comments

- Can you summarise the novel in 3 words?
- When you think about the book now, what is the most important thing about it for you?
- We’ve listened to each other’s thoughts and heard all sorts of things that each of us has noticed. Are you surprised by anything someone else said?

Connecting with Reading4Normal

Website: www.reading4normal.com



Appendix B

Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19

Think about aspects of your everyday life. Create a Reflective Journal to record these thoughts. You can reflect in any way you choose – make notes, tell a story, draw some sketches, create a private blog, record a video. These are some things you might want to think about including in your Journal:

Routines

- When do you generally wake up and go to bed?
- How do you spend your time at home? Describe a typical weekend, or weekday evening.

Friends & Hobbies

- How often do you see your friends? How do you socialise?
- Do you have any hobbies or favourite activities? Describe these.
- How often do you spend time outside? Do you have a garden or park nearby? What do you do when you are outside?

Technology

- If you use technology (laptops, iPads, smartphones) for school, what is this like? Do you enjoy learning in this way?
- Do you speak to friends using online tools (e.g. WhatsApp, Snapchat, TikTok, Zoom, Skype)? What kinds of things do you talk about using these technologies?
- Do you use applications in order to socialise with friends (e.g. Netflix Party, online games)?
- Do you use other forms of media (e.g. YouTube, blogs)? Describe these.

Travel & Holidays

- How do you travel to school/college/your job?
- Where do you go on holidays? What do you do when you are on holiday?
- What festive celebrations do you celebrate (e.g. Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Diwali, Christmas)? How do you feel about these celebrations?

Music/TV/Games

- How often do you watch TV or play games? What kind of shows or games do you enjoy?
- How do you listen to music? What is your favourite kind of music?

Spaces in the Home

- Who do you share your home space with?
- Do you have your own space at home? Describe it.

Shopping

- Do you shop most in high-street stores or online?
- What things do you like to buy?

Food

- Do you have meals with other people in your home? What kind of food do you eat together?
- What are your favourite snacks?

Family

- What are your relationships with parents, guardians, grandparents or other adults like?
- Do you have siblings at home? What do you like or dislike about them? What do you have in common?

“Just knowing that everybody shares that common interest of reading and books is enough to feel less judged in this space.”

Year 12 student

Appendix C

Background: The Research Project

Reading4Normal

The original research project involved 15 participants from three schools across England, spread across Year 9, Year 10, and Year 12. It established year-based reading groups with a mix of pupils from different schools. Participants were invited to select, read, and discuss three YA novels that offer realistic depictions of everyday life in pre-Covid contemporary Britain. They were asked to make notes about their reading in a Reflective Journal, focusing on ways that the books made them think about their own ordinary experiences – especially before, during, and after periods of lockdown. Reading groups then met to discuss the books and their responses via an online conferencing platform. A final session brought the Year 9, Year 10, and Year 12 reading groups together. Discussions were facilitated by a researcher.

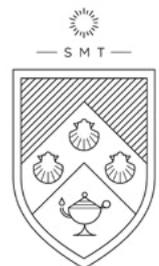
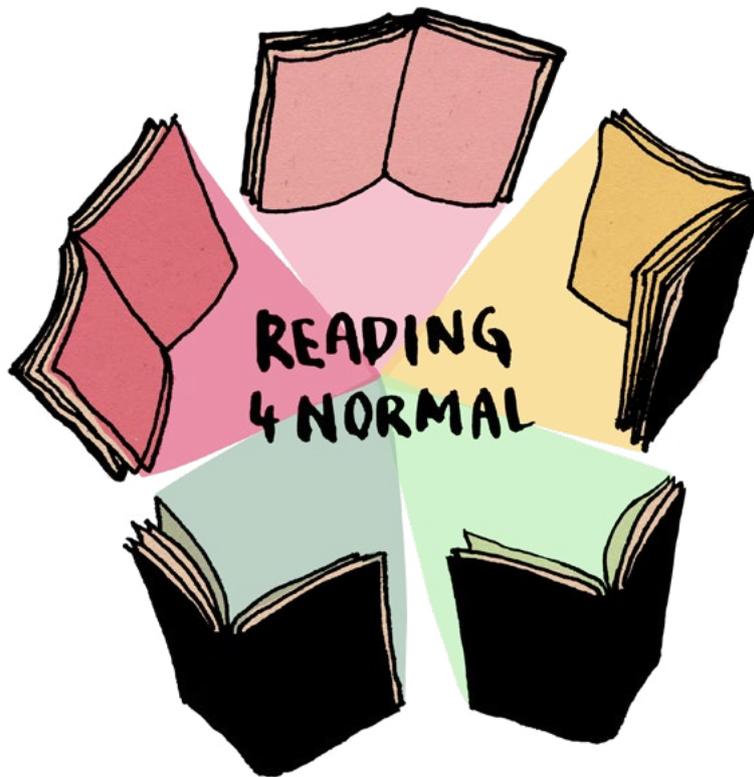
“I’m definitely going to start picking up more young adult books again.”

Year 12 student

“From now on I’m going to look for books that relate to me more.”

Year 9 Student





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