

Your next book

When you are proposing a book, don't resort to the filibuster or special pleading — though you may always keep these strategies in reserve. The club is not a stage for your every whim, but if you are ready to invest your social capital in a specific book, go to the mat. Just follow these rules:

- **Visualize the response.** You propose your usual list: Kingsley Amis, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, middle-period Jackie Collins. They snicker. What went wrong? You need to think about the club's successes and find a book that you want to read within that wide parameter.
- **Prepare for the smack-down.** You may not feel the love just by mentioning the title, so make a case for it by bringing the book itself, along with reviews from newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Your own talking points for selling the book and reasons it would be a good idea for the club is the most important factor of all. Communicate the "why" with confidence.
- **Come armed with a Hollywood pitch.** "It's *The nanny diaries* meets *Cry the beloved country*." "It's a mix of Oprah, Orwell and *People* magazine." "I've heard it's Hillary Clinton's favorite book." This is where name dropping and mixed metaphors are a must. Even if it bombs, your club will enjoy the hype.
- **Be specific about word-of-mouth recommendations.** Use the exact quote about the book from a person you know — or better, someone everyone knows about the book from a person you know — or better, someone everyone knows whose tips have panned out. Soon, with the words "Peaches recommends" you need not go further: Sold!
- **Remember, variety counts.** Think of your recent reads. Is this selection different enough to provide much-needed variety? Is your club challenged enough with past selections? Push the envelope.
- **Visualize your book club shelf.** Can you see the selection among the greats and against-all-odds favorites? Or is it filler that will just make club members mad?
- **Think ahead.** Are you prepared to take on the discussion duties? Even more important, are you looking forward to leading the discussion? Will you come armed with your own discussion questions in addition to the publisher's questions? It isn't fair to throw a book out and let it sink. Think ahead to the discussion and whether you are willing to create three to five discussion points. It's important that your friends are delighted and challenged, but only if you can give them the tools.
- **Plan before tackling tomes.** They can be very long, and reading time is not abundantly available. Make it easy on everyone and establish a time for each section of the book, Oprah-style (all summer for *Anna Karenina*, anyone?) Suggest a reading time spread out across one, two but no more than three months. Intersperse with DVD nights (and gentle reminders) and the promise of a big celebration at the end. Soon, this will become a custom of your club.

- **Sweeten the deal.** If you know it will be a challenging book, offer to make something everyone will like. It's funny how the maniacal laughter ceases after a slice of your famous chocolate raspberry torte.
- **Call to order.** Many clubs enjoy the free-for-all discussion about the next book. But if this system is not working, consider these classic strategies:
 - The next host chooses the book.
 - Vote with ballots, using as many rounds as you wish at the club.
 - Solicit suggestions online, and have the next host either choose or conduct an online vote.

— From *The book group companion*, p. 74