

The Open Sidewalk Project

A living archive of stories in motion

Discover • Reflect • Set Free • Mark the Moment



Book Club Toolkit Guide

For Reading Groups of All Kinds

Turn your next group read into a traveling library. Instead of your discussion ending when the book closes, each member sets their copy free—creating a constellation of the same story, each traveling its own path.



WHY BOOK CLUBS LOVE THE OPEN SIDEWALK PROJECT

Your book club already creates community through shared reading. The Open Sidewalk Project adds a powerful new dimension: **collective release**.

What Changes:

Traditional Book Club:

Read → Discuss → Book sits on shelf → Forgotten

Book Club + Open Sidewalk Project:

Read → Discuss → Reflect → Release together → Track journeys → Reunite to share where books traveled → New connections emerge

Benefits for Your Group:

- **Extended engagement** — Discussion continues as books travel
- **Shared adventure** — Whose book will travel farthest?
- **Meaningful ritual** — Letting go becomes part of your reading practice
- **Community impact** — Your club sends 8-15 books into the world each month
- **New conversation** — "Where should I release mine?" becomes part of discussion
- **Deeper reflection** — Writing for unknown future readers changes how you think about books



INSIGHT: Book clubs that participate in OSP report deeper discussions and stronger member bonds. The act of collective release creates shared purpose beyond reading.



THE BOOK CLUB CHALLENGE

How It Works

The Book Club Challenge transforms your reading group into a book-releasing team. Here's the simple framework:

1. **Before Meeting:** Everyone reads the selected book
2. **During Meeting:** Discuss as usual + write Sidewalk Reflections together
3. **After Meeting:** Everyone sets their copy free within 1 week
4. **Follow-Up:** Track where books travel, share updates at next meeting
5. **Competition (Optional):** Whose book travels farthest in 6 months?

The Timeline:

Week 1-4: Everyone reads the book

Week 4 (Meeting Day): Discuss + Register + Write reflections

Week 5: Release window—everyone sets their book free

Weeks 6-10: Track journeys, share discoveries

Week 10+ (Next Meeting): Report where books have traveled



GROUP COORDINATION WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet at your meeting to coordinate your collective release:

BOOK CLUB CHALLENGE COORDINATION

Book Title: _____

Meeting Date: _____

Number of Participants: _____

STEP 1: REGISTER BOOKS

- Who will request BookCrossing IDs? _____
- How many BCIDs needed? _____
- Distribution method: Email list At meeting Text group

STEP 2: REFLECTION WRITING

- Will we write reflections together at the meeting? Yes No
- If not together, deadline to complete: _____
- Reflection prompt we'll use: _____

STEP 3: RELEASE COORDINATION

- Release deadline: _____ (suggest 1 week after meeting)
- Will we release simultaneously? Yes No
- If simultaneous, date/time: _____
- Photo requirement: Required Optional Encouraged

STEP 4: TRACKING PLAN

- Who will create/manage tracking map? _____
- How often will we check? Weekly Monthly At next meeting
- Where will we share updates? Group text Email Private Facebook group

STEP 5: COMPETITION (OPTIONAL)

- Are we doing "Farthest Journey" competition? Yes No
- Time period: 3 months 6 months 1 year

• Prize for winner: _____

TRACKING MAP FOR YOUR CLUB

Creating Your Book Club Journey Map

One member volunteers to create and maintain a visual map showing where all your club's books travel. This becomes a shared artifact of your collective reading experience.

Tools You Can Use:

- **Google My Maps** — Free, collaborative, easy to share
- **Physical Wall Map** — Pin locations, draw journey lines
- **Spreadsheet** — Simple list with cities/states/countries
- **OSP Built-in Tracker** — Search by your club's name or book title

What to Track:

For Each Book:

- Member's name
- BookCrossing ID
- Release location & date
- Current status (traveling, logged by new reader, unknown)
- Cities/states/countries reached
- Total readers so far
- Most recent reflection logged
- Distance traveled from release point

Map Update Ritual:

At each monthly meeting, spend 10 minutes updating your map together:

1. Go around the room—each person reports their book's status
2. Mapper adds new pins/lines/data

3. Celebrate: "Sarah's book made it to Oregon!"
4. Project the map on screen so everyone can see the constellation



"WHOSE BOOK TRAVELS FARTHEST?" COMPETITION

How to Run a Friendly Competition

Turn collective release into a playful challenge. Whose book will travel the farthest from its starting point?

Competition Rules:

Goal: Book that travels the greatest distance from its release point wins

Time Period: 3 months, 6 months, or 1 year (club decides)

Measurement: Distance calculated from release location to most recent logged location

Tracking: Only logged journeys count (encourages members to check their book's status)

Winner: Announced at special meeting with small prize (book-related, of course!)

Prize Ideas:

- Winner picks next month's book
- \$20 bookstore gift card (club members chip in \$2 each)
- Handmade "Book Champion" trophy
- Dinner hosting responsibilities passed to someone else
- Custom bookplate: "[Name]'s Book Traveled [X] Miles!"

Alternative Competitions:

Most Readers: Book logged by the most people

Most Countries: Book that crosses the most international borders

Longest Journey Time: Book still traveling after 2+ years

Best Reflection Chain: Book with the most thoughtful series of reflections

Most Creative Release: Most interesting release location/method

💬 DISCUSSION ENHANCEMENT

Pre-Release Discussion: "What Makes This Book Worth Setting Free?"

Before writing reflections, facilitate a group discussion about *why* this particular book deserves to travel. This primes deeper thinking.

Discussion Questions:

For the Group:

- What about this book would resonate with a stranger?
- If you could only save one passage to share, what would it be?
- Who NEEDS to read this book right now? Why?
- What assumptions does this book challenge?
- What emotions does this book evoke that are hard to find elsewhere?
- If this book could only reach one more person, what would you hope for them?

The "Imagining Where It Might Go" Exercise:

After everyone has decided where they'll release their copy, go around the room:

- 1. State your release location:** "I'm releasing mine on the train to Portland."
- 2. Imagine the finder:** "I imagine a commuter, tired from work, who needs an escape."
- 3. Project the journey:** "Maybe they'll pass it to a friend. Maybe it ends up in a Portland bookstore café."
- 4. Group adds possibilities:** Others contribute: "What if it goes international from there?"

This exercise makes the act of release feel intentional and connected to your discussion.

Post-Release Discussion Topics (Next Meeting):

At your following meeting, dedicate time to reporting on releases and early journeys:

Go-Around Questions:

- Where did you release your copy?
- What was it like letting go?
- Has anyone logged finding it yet?
- Did anything unexpected happen?
- Would you release differently next time?
- Did the act of releasing change how you think about the book?

Connecting Themes to Letting Go:

Use the book's themes to explore what it means to set stories free:

Example: If reading a book about grief or loss:

"This book is about letting go of what we can't control. In releasing it, we're practicing that same act—trusting it will find who needs it, even though we can't control the outcome."

Example: If reading a book about connection:

"This book explores how strangers become meaningful to each other. By setting it free, we're creating the conditions for that same kind of connection between unknown readers."

Example: If reading a book about adventure or journey:

"The protagonist went on a journey without knowing the destination. Now the book itself goes on a journey. What does it mean for a story to have its own adventure?"

REFLECTION WRITING

Writing Reflections as a Group Activity

Set aside 20 minutes at your meeting for everyone to write their Sidewalk Reflections together. This creates shared focus and helps those who feel intimidated by writing.

The Process:

- 1. 5 minutes:** Silent brainstorming—everyone jots down key words/phrases
- 2. 10 minutes:** Individual writing—no talking, just writing
- 3. 5 minutes:** Optional sharing—volunteers read theirs aloud



TIP: Provide a few sentence starters to help people begin. No one stares at a blank page.

Group Reflection Prompts

These prompts encourage reflections that acknowledge the book club context:

Prompt 1: The Discussion Changed Me

"Our book club discussed [Book Title] and the conversation stayed with me because..."

Prompt 2: Collective Wisdom

"Ten of us read this book together. We each saw something different. I saw..."

Prompt 3: Why We're Setting This Free Together

"My book club agreed this book deserves to travel because..."

Prompt 4: One Thing I'll Remember

"From this book and our discussion, the one thing I'll carry forward is..."

Prompt 5: The Reader Who Needs This

"I hope the next reader is someone who..."

Individual Reflection Prompts

These prompts help each member craft a unique, personal reflection:

Prompt 1: The Moment That Mattered

"There's a scene in this book that I keep returning to..."

Prompt 2: What This Book Taught Me

"Before reading this, I believed _____. Now I think _____. "

Prompt 3: The Question It Left Me With

"This book made me wonder..."

Prompt 4: Why I'm Letting It Go

"I'm setting this book free because someone else needs to..."

Prompt 5: Where I Was When I Read It

"I read this during [season/time in life]. It found me when..."

Prompt 6: The Sentence I Underlined

"There's a line on page ____ that I highlighted: '...' Here's why it matters..."

Prompt 7: What I Hope for You

"Dear future reader, I hope this book..."

How to Make Each Reflection Unique

Even though your club read the same book, each reflection should feel personal. Here's how to encourage uniqueness:

Encourage members to:

- ✓ Share a specific personal experience the book connected to
- ✓ Mention where they were when they read it (physical or emotional place)
- ✓ Quote a different passage than others choose
- ✓ Focus on one character, theme, or moment rather than trying to cover everything
- ✓ Write to a specific imagined future reader (a student, a parent, a traveler, etc.)
- ✓ Include why THIS book, not just any book, mattered

Reflection Length:

Keep it brief but meaningful. **Aim for 3-5 sentences** (50-100 words). Enough to give context, not so much that future readers are overwhelmed.



GOLDEN RULE: Write what you'd want to read if YOU found this book with a note inside.



EXAMPLES FROM OTHER BOOK CLUBS

Real Reflections from Book Clubs Using OSP

Book: The Midnight Library by Matt Haig

Book Club: Portland Readers Collective

"Our book club of eight moms read this together during a hard year. We talked about regret, choices, and second chances. I'm setting this free on a park bench near the elementary school where I volunteer, hoping it finds another parent who needs to remember that every choice opens a new door. Released March 2024 in Portland, OR."

Book: Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Book Club: Equity & Environment Book Group

"Ten of us read this over two months. We each saw something different—some saw science, some saw spirituality, some saw both. I saw an invitation to reciprocity with the land. I'm releasing this at a community garden because that feels right. If you find this, read slowly. Don't rush. Let it change you. Released June 2024 in Minneapolis, MN."

Book: Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel

Book Club: Downtown Library Book Club

"We read this post-pandemic and couldn't stop talking about art, survival, and what we carry forward. The line 'survival is insufficient' became our club motto. I'm leaving this on the subway—a traveling book for a book about traveling performers. Whoever you are, I hope you find beauty in unexpected places. Released September 2024 in Brooklyn, NY."

Book: The House in the Cerulean Sea by TJ Klune

Book Club: Queer Reads Book Club

"This book made our entire club cry (in the best way). We talked about found family, acceptance, and the courage to choose love over fear. I'm setting this free at our local LGBTQ+ center because I want it to find someone who needs to know they're enough exactly as they are. Released November 2024 in Austin, TX."

Book: Educated by Tara Westover

Book Club: Women's Book Circle

"Six of us read this memoir about education, family, and breaking cycles. Our discussion got intense—we talked about loyalty, truth, and the cost of growth. I'm releasing this at the community college library because education changed my life too, and I want this story to find someone standing at their own crossroads.

Released January 2025 in Phoenix, AZ."

What Makes These Reflections Work:

- ✓ They reference the book club context
- ✓ They share specific personal or group reactions
- ✓ They explain the release location choice
- ✓ They speak directly to the future reader
- ✓ They include place and date
- ✓ They feel authentic, not generic

⌚ IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

Preparing for Your First Book Club Challenge

4 WEEKS BEFORE MEETING

- Choose a book for next month's discussion
- Mention OSP to your book club, gauge interest
- Send email explaining the Book Club Challenge
- Share this guide with members who want details

1 WEEK BEFORE MEETING

- Request BookCrossing IDs (one per participating member)
- Receive BCIDs via email from OSP
- Forward BCIDs to each member
- Remind members to bring their book to the meeting

AT THE MEETING

- Conduct your usual book discussion
- Transition to OSP portion (20-30 minutes)
- Fill out Group Coordination Worksheet together
- Write Sidewalk Reflections (20 minutes)
- Members label books with BCIDs
- Discuss release plans & competition (if doing one)
- Designate tracker/map keeper

WITHIN 1 WEEK AFTER MEETING

- Each member releases their book
- Each member logs their release at opensidewalkproject.org
- Each member uploads release photo
- Tracker creates initial map/spreadsheet

ONGOING

- Check book status monthly
- Share updates in group chat

- Update map as books travel
- Celebrate at next meeting



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Making the Book Club Challenge Work

Start Small: Don't pressure everyone to participate. If 5 out of 12 members want to try it, that's perfect. Others may join later when they see how fun it is.

Make It Easy: Handle the BCID registration for everyone. Don't make members do homework. Bring printed labels to the meeting.

Keep It Optional: Frame it as "Anyone interested in trying something new?" Not "Everyone must do this."

Celebrate Progress: Even if only one book gets logged by a new reader, celebrate it! The movement is what matters.

Don't Force Writing: If someone struggles with reflection writing, let them skip it or dictate while someone else types. The act of release is what counts.

Common Questions:

Q: What if some members want to keep their books?

A: That's completely fine. Participation is optional. They can still enjoy the discussion without releasing.

Q: What if no one logs our books?

A: Give it time (3-6 months). Books sometimes sit for a while before being found. The act of release still matters.

Q: Can we do this with library books or borrowed books?

A: No—only release books you own. If your club uses library books, members can buy used copies specifically to release.



YOU'RE READY!

Your book club is about to become a constellation of traveling stories. You have everything you need:

- ✓ Understanding of the Book Club Challenge
- ✓ Group coordination worksheet
- ✓ Competition framework (if you want it)
- ✓ Discussion enhancement questions
- ✓ Reflection prompts (group & individual)
- ✓ Real examples from other clubs
- ✓ Implementation checklist

Your First Challenge:

Pick your next book. Introduce the idea. See who's interested. Start small. Make it fun. Track the journey. Celebrate where books go.

Your discussion doesn't end when the book closes—it continues across cities, states, and readers you'll never meet.

QUESTIONS OR SUPPORT?

We're here to help book clubs succeed!

Email: bookclubs@opensidewalkproject.org

Book Club Community: Join our Facebook group to connect with other participating book clubs

Whether you need help coordinating your first challenge, want to share where your books have traveled, or just need encouragement—reach out anytime.

Keeping the Sidewalk OPEN!

Open Sidewalk Project

Making books travel farther

opensidewalkproject.org/bookclubs

Connect with other book clubs:

#OpenSidewalkProject #BookClubChallenge #SidewalkReflections

#BooksInMotion

This guide is part of Basecamp resources at opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp

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