

Daniel Boone Regional Library

Book Discussion Kit



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Selection
2005**

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www.dbrl.org

Tips for Book Discussions

from Washington Center for the Book at Seattle Public Library

Reading Critically

Books that make excellent choices for discussion groups have a good plot, well-drawn characters, and a polished style. These books usually present the author's view of an important truth and not infrequently send a message to the reader. Good books for discussion move the reader and stay in the mind long after the book is read and the discussion is over. These books can be read more than once, and each time we learn something new.

Reading for a book discussion—whether you are the leader or simply a participant—differs from reading purely for pleasure. As you read a book chosen for a discussion, ask questions and mark down important pages you might want to refer back to. Make notes like, "Is this significant?" or "Why does the author include this?" Making notes as you go slows down your reading but gives you a better sense of what the book is really about and saves you the time of searching out important passages later.

Obviously, asking questions as you go means you don't know the answer yet, and often you never do discover the answers. But during discussion of your questions, others may provide insight for you. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions because often the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose.

As with any skill, good literary consciousness grows with practice. You can never relax your vigilance because a good author uses every word to reveal something. Try to be aware of what the author is revealing about himself and what he wants you to learn about life from his perspective. Appreciate the artistic presentation and the entertainment value, but also reap the benefits of the experience the author is sharing.

Another way to analyze the important themes of a book is to consider what premise the author started with. You can imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking himself, "what if ... " questions.

When you meet the characters in the book, place yourself at the scene. Think of them as you do the people around you. Judge them. Think about their faults and their motives. What would it be like to interact with them? Listen to the tone and style of their dialogue for authenticity. Read portions aloud to get to know the characters and the author's style.

Sometimes an author uses the structure of the book to illustrate an important concept or to create a mood. Notice how the author structured the book. Are chapters prefaced by quotes? How do they apply to the content of the chapters? How many narrators tell the story? Who are they? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Does it make sense?

Compare the book to others by the same author or to books by different authors that have a similar message or style. Comparing one author's work with another's can help you solidify your opinions, as well as define for you qualities you may otherwise miss.

The very best books are those that insinuate themselves into your experience: They reveal an important truth or provide a profound sense of kinship between reader and writer. Searching for, identifying, and discussing these truths often make the book more important and more significant.

Asking questions, reading carefully, imagining yourself into the story, analyzing style and structure, and searching for personal meaning in a work of literature all enhance the work's value and the discussion potential for your group.

The Discussion

Come prepared with 10 to 15 open-ended questions. Questions that can be answered yes or no tend to cut off discussion.

Questions should be used to guide the discussion and keep it on track, but be ready to let the discussion flow naturally. You'll often find that the questions you've prepared will come up naturally as part of the discussion.

Remind participants that there are not necessarily any right answers to the questions posed.

Don't be afraid to criticize a book, but try to get the group to go beyond the "It just didn't appeal to me" statement. What was it about the book that made it unappealing? The style? The pacing? The characters? Has the author written other books that were better? Did it remind you of a book that you liked/disliked? Many times the best discussions are about books that the majority of the group disliked.

Try to keep a balance in the discussion between personal revelations and reactions and a response to the book itself. Every reader responds to a book in ways that are intimately tied to his/her background, upbringing, and world view. A book about a senseless murder will naturally strike some sort of chord in a reader whose mother was murdered. That's interesting, but what's more interesting is how the author chose to present the murder, or the author's attitude toward the murderer and victim. It's often too easy to let a group drown in reminiscences ... if that's what the whole group wants to do, that's fine, but keep in mind that it's not a book discussion.

About the Author

Orson Scott Card, an acclaimed science fiction writer, confessed that as a child, he did not consider writing as a career. His first love, then and now, is teaching. Only after majoring in theater in college and traveling to Brazil as a missionary did his literary side awaken, eventually leading him to become a New York Times best-selling author.

Card was the first writer to receive both the Hugo and Nebula awards for best novel two years in a row, first for "Ender's Game" and then for the sequel, "Speaker for the Dead." His 'Ender's Cycle' has successfully crossed genre lines by creating a sense of wonder that pulls in readers of all ages and from all walks of life. The latest addition, "Shadow of the Giant," hit bookshelves in 2005.

"Ender's Game," which has sold more than one million copies worldwide, is scheduled to hit the big screen in 2006. Warner Brothers bought the rights and plans are for Wolfgang Peterson (Troy) to direct the movie based on both "Ender's Game" and "Ender's Shadow."

Other popular series by Card include, "The Homecoming Saga" and "The Tales of Alvin Maker," as well as the individual title, "Pastwatch" where Card retells ancient scripture as science fiction.

Born in Richland, Washington in 1951, Card spent his youth growing up in California, Arizona and Utah. He received degrees from Brigham Young University and the University of Utah.

Card currently lives in Greensboro, North Carolina with his wife and children. To read more about the author and to keep up on his current work, visit his official Web site: www.hatrack.com

Orson Scott Card Selected Bibliography

Series:

Tales of Alvin Maker

Homecoming

Mayflower (with Kathryn H. Kidd)

Women of Genesis

Ender's Cycle:

Ender's Game (Tor, Jan. 1985) Nebula Award 1985, Hugo Award 1986

Speaker for the Dead (Tor, Feb. 1986) Nebula Award 1986, Hugo Award 1987

Xenocide (Tor, Aug. 1991)

Children of the Mind (Tor, 1996)

Ender's Shadow (Tor, August 1999)

Shadow of the Hegemon (Tor, Jan. 2001)

Shadow Puppets (Tor, Aug. 2002)

Shadow of the Giant (Tor, 2005)

Other Novels Include:

Enchantment (Del Rey, 1999)

Homebody (HarperCollins, 1998)

Stone Tables (Deseret Book, 1997)

Treasure Box (HarperCollins, 1996)

Pastwatch: The Redemption of Christopher Columbus (Tor, 1996)

Lost Boys (HarperCollins, 1992)

Treason (St. Martin's Press, Oct. 1988)

Wyrms (Arbor House/Tor, Jun. 87)

The Worthing Chronicle (Ace, Jul. 1983)

Hart's Hope (Berkley, Jan. 1983; Tor, Feb. 1988)

Songmaster (Dial/Dell, 1979)

Card has also written numerous short stories, essays, technical writing, plays and poetry.

About the Book

Andrew "Ender" Wiggin thinks he is playing computer simulated war games; he is, in fact, engaged in something far more desperate. The result of genetic experimentation, Ender may be the military genius Earth desperately needs in a war against an alien enemy seeking to destroy all human life. The only way to find out is to throw Ender into ever harsher training, to chip away and find the diamond inside, or destroy him utterly. Ender Wiggin is six years old when it begins. He will grow up fast.

But Ender is not the only result of the experiment. The war with the Buggers has been raging for a hundred years, and the quest for the perfect general has been underway almost as long. Ender's two older siblings, Peter and Valentine, are every bit as unusual as he is, but in very different ways. While Peter was too uncontrollably violent, Valentine very nearly lacks the capability for violence altogether. Neither was found suitable for the military's purpose. But they are driven by their jealousy of Ender, and by their inbred drive for power. Peter seeks to control the political process, to become a ruler. Valentine's abilities turn more toward the subtle control of the beliefs of commoner and elite alike, through powerfully convincing essays. Hiding their youth and identities behind the anonymity of the computer networks, these two begin working together to shape the destiny of Earth—an Earth that has no future at all if their brother Ender fails.

Newsday said of this novel "Card has done strong work before, but this could be the book to break him out of the pack." It was. Ender's Game took the sf world by storm, sweeping the awards. It won both the Hugo and Nebula, and rose to the top of national bestseller lists.

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Discussion Questions

(From the Web site of Spokane Is Reading, the community reading program of Spokane, Washington which read "Ender's Game" in 2004.)

"Ender's Game" has often been cited as a good book to read by readers who are not fans of science fiction. Why does it appeal to both fans of science fiction and those who do not usually read science fiction?

Ender's childhood is unusual. Does a person robbed of a "normal" childhood have any possibility of stability as an adult? Does Ender have any chance of living "happily ever after?"

Do you think that Ender's Game challenges your understanding of how children behave? What does Card think marks the distinction between child and adult?

How does Ender's continual belief that he is like Peter affect his development? How is Ender like and unlike Peter? How does empathy play a role?

Peter appears to be the personification of evil, but, as Locke, he acts as a good person. How does Card treat the concept of good versus evil in "Ender's Game?"

The Buggers communicate telepathically using no identifiable external means of communication. Was it inevitable that war would have to occur when two sentient species met but were unable to communicate?

Is "Ender's Game" really about war?

Think about the ethics of Earth's solution to the previous invasions. Does the threat to Earth justify the Battle Schools?

Why do you think Battle School training involved playing endless games? Did the games do what they were intended to do?

Why doesn't Ender leave the Battle School? Why are there so few girls in the Battle School?

Why do you think that they kept breaking up the groups every time Ender got his command together? Was this truly productive in making him a better commander?

Talk about some of the other characters in the Battle School. Bean and Petra, how are their roles in the story important?

Was the ending realistic? How would a different ending have affected the tone of the novel? What other ending do you think might have been possible?

Further Reading

If you enjoyed "Ender's Game," you might also be interested in some of these titles.

Titles Recommended by NovelList (©EBSCO Publishing)

Joe Haldeman. *The Forever War* (1975)

When a spacecraft from Earth is destroyed, soldier William Mandella becomes part of an elite force that fights the extraterrestrials from the planet Taurus. Hugo, Nebula and Locus awards.

Robert A. Heinlein. *Starship Troopers* (1959)

In this futuristic novel about war and political systems, a young recruit goes through the rigors of basic training. When war comes, this soldier joins in the fight against the insect-like enemy. Hugo Award.

Lois Lowry. *The Giver* (1993)

Jonas lives in a society where there is no pain, fear, or sorrow. When he reaches the age of twelve and receives the assignment to become the Receiver of Memory for his community, Jonas comes to understand the dark side of this seemingly perfect place. Newbery Medal, ALA Notable Children's Books, YALSA Best 100 Books (1950-2000)

Philip Pullman. *The Golden Compass* (1996)

Lyra is an orphan living in Oxford, England, when her friend Roger disappears. Her search for Roger leads Lyra to the top of the world and into the world of evil scientific experiments. This novel is the first in the His Dark Materials series. ALA Notable Children's Book, YALSA Best Books for Young Adults.

Orson Scott Card. *Ender's Shadow* (1999)

Card has written several novels in a series following "Ender's Game," but "Ender's Shadow" was written nearly 25 years later as a companion, rather than as a sequel. This is the same story as in "Ender's Game," told from the point of view of a different character named Bean. Alex Award winner, Booklist Editors' Choice Award, Library Journal Best Books, School Library Journal Adult Books for Young Adults selection, YALSA Best Books for Young Adults.

Titles Recommended by the Spokane Is Reading Program, Spokane, WA

Isaac Asimov. *Foundation, Foundation and Empire, Second Foundation*

These three books comprise the classic science fiction series that details the decline and fall of the Galactic Empire. A handful of people are led by Hari Seldon, the developer of the science of "psychohistory." Their aim is to establish foundations that will preserve human civilization and dramatically shorten the barbaric dark age that will follow the predicted end of the Empire. The original trilogy has won numerous awards.

David Brin. *Startide Rising*

The Terran exploration vessel Streaker has crashed on the uncharted water world of Kithrup, bearing one of the most important discoveries in galactic history. Below, a handful of her human and dolphin crew battles a hostile planet to safeguard her secret—the fate of the Progenitors. Hugo and Nebula Award winner.

Arthur C Clark. *Rendezvous With Rama*

A mysterious celestial body is discovered heading toward the sun. It is named Rama by those on earth. Rama is a vast cylinder about 31 miles long and 12 miles across. The spaceship Endeavor lands on Rama and her crew has three weeks to explore its hollow interior. This is one of Clark's finest novels and the winner of both the Hugo and Nebula Awards.

Margaret Peterson Haddix. *Among the Hidden*

In a future, where the Population Police enforce the law limiting a family to only two children, Luke has lived all his twelve years in isolation and fear on his parent's farm, until another "Third" convinces him that the government is wrong.

Frank Herbert. *Dune*

Dune is the story of the desert planet Arrakis, the focus of an intricate power struggle between two noble houses of an interstellar empire. Hugo and Nebula Award winner and one of the most highly regarded science fiction novels.

Robert Jordan. *Eye of the World*

The peaceful villagers of Edmond's Field pay little attention to the rumors of war in the western lands until a savage attack by troll-like minions of the Dark One forces three young men to confront a destiny which has its origins in the time known as "The Breaking of the World." This is the first book of the "Wheel of Time" series.

Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle. *The Mote in God's Eye*

In the centuries that mankind has explored and colonized the galaxy, no other intelligent beings have been encountered. Then a light sail probe carrying a dead alien enters a star system occupied by humans. This is the intriguing story of how the source of the probe is traced and its ancient civilization, the "Moties" discovered. All seems peaceful on this first encounter, but the Moties have a dark secret.

Larry Niven. *Ringworld*

Two humans and two aliens are traveling to distant reaches of space to explore a recently discovered artifact—an intriguing “ringworld” with millions of times the livable area of Earth. The Ringworld is obviously the product of a species possessing a very advanced technology. The explorers crash land on the surface and encounter a number of alien groups while trying to puzzle out the Ringworld’s origin, secrets, and the fate of those who built it. Hugo Award and Nebula Award winner.

David Weber. *Empire from the Ashes*

This book compiles three earlier novels—“Mutineer’s Moon,” “Armageddon Inheritance,” and “Heirs of Empire.” What if Earth’s moon was not a natural satellite at all? What if the moon was a very, very, large spaceship that had been left in orbit around the Earth by an ancient and long lost interstellar empire? Could the technology of the old empire be used to save humanity from destruction by an alien race?

Bruce Catton. *Mr. Lincoln’s Army*

This is an account of the early years of the Civil War, when the dashing, but ultimately ineffectual General George B. McClellan was in command of the Army of the Potomac. Catton is renowned for his vivid and lyrical narratives. This book is the first volume in The Army of the Potomac trilogy.

Orson Scott Card. *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*

Orson Scott Card has written an acclaimed work on the art and craft of writing science fiction and fantasy. Card provides invaluable advice for every science fiction and fantasy writer interested in constructing stories about people, worlds, and events that stretch the boundaries of the possible and the magical.

Stephen Crane. *Red Badge of Courage*

A true classic. You probably read it in high school, but did you really appreciate it? A young soldier named Henry Fleming goes off to war as a naïve boy and returns a man. It’s not as clichéd as it sounds. This is an insightful look at the Civil War from the perspective of an enlisted soldier. This book is worth a re-read.

John Hersey. *The Child Buyer: A Novel in the form of Hearings Before the Standing Committee on Education, Welfare & Public Morality of a Certain State Senate, Investigating the Conspiracy of Mr. Wissey Jones, with Others, to Purchase a Male Child*

The title says a lot! The child in question is to be acquired for some unspecified project to “aid the national defense.”

Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*

Sun Tzu wrote this classic work on warfare in the 6th century BC. Heavy on strategy, this book is still studied by military organizations today.

War Games [Videorecording]/VHS/DVD

Young electronics wizard David Lightman unwittingly hooks into America’s supersecret wargames computer and the world is suddenly threatened with nuclear annihilation.