

Build your own book club at your local library

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FULL TEXT

The pandemic made us rethink library programs to connect with readers and offer a sense of community. Shortly after Gov. Tony Evers' Safer at Home orders were in effect last spring, Quaranstories was introduced at the Kimberly-Little Chute Public Library.

Quaranstories is a short story club in which participants read one short story a week and meet via Zoom for a discussion every other week.

"This idea was actually pitched by one of my library-loving friends at the start of the pandemic," said Julie Conrad, Quaranstories moderator. "After deciding to go ahead with the idea, I thought it would be fun to choose a short story by a contemporary author one week and a short story by a classic author the next."

The group has discussed short stories by Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Stephen King and Isabel Allende.

"The classics have been challenging in that the use of language has changed over the years and we are often looking into what the old expressions meant," said Julie. "It has been a great alternative to a traditional book club. We spend 30 minutes discussing each story in the one hour bi-weekly Zoom meeting. Short stories often leave a lot to the imagination, so it is always interesting to hear the different interpretations of the stories."

Quaranstories has all the benefits of a book club, including an opportunity to socialize, to exercise your brain and to explore different types of literature, with less of a commitment. Participant Cindy said, "I don't have time to read a book. I can make time for two short stories. Also, we have a great group of people to discuss the stories with and we all come away with a perspective that we did not see reading the story."

A Zoom account is not necessary to participate. Those interested can contact Julie at jconrad@kimlit.org to get an invitation.

If someone enjoys reading the stories but is not interested in the Zoom discussion, that is OK too, Julie added. "I encourage the participants to send me a few comments about the stories so I can publish them on the Facebook event –no spoilers allowed! I also encourage them to suggest short stories for future discussions. It has been a really enjoyable way to engage during the pandemic and I feel like it supports our mission of inspiring and supporting lifelong learning and the love of reading."

Existing and newly formed book clubs also got creative for getting together safely during a pandemic. Groups arranged to meet in parking lots or via web-based virtual meeting rooms.

Most libraries remain open for curbside pickups for materials or make book club recommendations. The Menasha Library offers book club kits and a list of books with multiple copies in the system that anyone interested in building a book club can access at menashalibrary.org/bookclubs. The Appleton library offers a Book Club in a Bag (apl.org/bookclub) with more than 150 titles to choose from. Patrons request a title, and the library puts together a kit with as many copies as are needed.

Facebook is another option for interacting while apart. Libraries brought their children's story times to Facebook LIVE to continue to share stories, songs, and special guests with younger patrons. Facebook also recently created an option for users to gather in a virtual "room" for group discussions.

Sharing books and stories is as important as ever, and with patience and creativity, libraries will continue to adapt and find ways to connect them with readers.

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DETAILS

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