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Stay at Home Book Club resonates with adult readers

In 2019, Melyssa Prince set a goal of reading one book a week – setting her sights on 52 books total.

“At the end of the year, I found I wasn’t really enjoying what I read, I was just trying to reach a goal,” she said. “This year, I have just decided to read at my leisure and read what gives me satisfaction. I am averaging 2.5 books per month, and I am OK with that.”

The joy of reading is what the Fort Worth Public Library’s [Stay at Home Book Club](#) is all about. Launched in March, the group is hosted on Facebook and is approaching 400 members, welcoming new ones nearly every day.

Prince, who has participated in traditional in-person book clubs in the past and has even hosted her own, is an active participant in several of the Library’s online programs.

“The Stay at Home Book Club has been wonderful, especially during this time of limited activity due to the coronavirus,” she said. “Even when I haven’t participated in the reading of the book, it’s still a joy to engage with other participants on the Facebook platform.”

Library staff had considered launching a virtual book club about a year ago.

“We had tossed around the idea of a virtual book club last year but were overwhelmed by the variety of platforms available,” said Jana Hill, Adult Services manager for the Library. “The arrival of COVID-19 in the U.S. compelled us to make some quick decisions so the book club could be established by the time stay-at-home orders were imposed on Fort Worth.”

The response has surprised Hill. The club is quickly approaching 400 members, with new ones joining nearly every day. So far, about 75 members live outside of Fort Worth, and about half the group is younger than 45.

“We had no idea that this program would take off the way it has, but we have clearly tapped into an audience,” Hill said. “I’m amazed by how lively our conversations are, even if they happen completely asynchronously via posts to the group.”

About every two weeks, members vote on the next book from a curated selection. All the picks are titles that have unlimited eBook checkouts in the [Fort Worth Public Library’s digital collection](#).



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“It makes it feel more like a group of adults socializing than being in school,” Hill said. “And we have received countless comments about the book selections really expanding members’ horizons.”

Rosann Pickett is new to the shared reading experience.

“This is the first time I have participated in a book club, and I have really enjoyed seeing the other members’ comments and getting different perspectives,” she said. “I especially enjoy the relaxed, informal way the book club works.”

Pickett, who reads two or three books a month on average, said her favorite club selections have been “Good Omens,” followed closely by “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.”

“I have really enjoyed meeting Jana Hill even if it was only on Facebook,” she said. “She seems like what Anne of Green Gables called a ‘kindred spirit.’”

Prince said the work Hill does to rally the group has really brought it together. She credits librarians Katie Combs and Rita Alfaro for all the work they put into their online programs.

“I feel like I’ve made new friends and am a little less lonely as a result of the Stay at Home Book Club and the Fort Worth Public Library as a whole,” Prince said.

Virtual programming like the Stay at Home Book Club could stick around after Library locations become fully operational once again. The allure of adult interaction and sharing a passion for reading in a more unstructured environment has proven its worth.

“It’s rewarding to me to not only see the growth and level of engagement within the group, but also to see group members participating in other adult programs, such as Bookshelf Friday, Fort Worth Reads, Trivia, Spanish Fundamentals, and the Mayor’s Summer Reading Challenge,” Hill said. “Adult Services as a Library unit has only existed for a little over a year, so seeing this community form so quickly has been a highlight of my career as a librarian!”