



Beyond Words
empowering people through pictures



Book Club Starter Guide



Introduction

Welcome to our guide to starting your very own Beyond Words Book Club!

We've designed this guide to be as simple to use as possible. It will give you a short explanation of what a Beyond Words Book Club is, how reading word-free picture stories works, how to run your Book Club, and a few top tips to help you get started.

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What is a Beyond Words Book Club and who are we?

We're Beyond Words, the UK's charity for visual literacy and emotional wellbeing. Visual literacy means making meaning from the things we see.

Everyone knows pictures are powerful - our level of **visual literacy** is what helps us draw connections and understanding. It tells us that a smile means someone is happy to see us, or that a green light means go.

People who find written words difficult are often very good at reading pictures. Our Book Clubs use word-free picture stories to create a safe space where people who can read pictures can make friends, have fun and talk about the issues that affect their lives - as well as enjoying a good book!

Beyond Words Book Clubs are great for all sorts of people, from people with learning disabilities to refugees, people living with dementia, d/Deaf people and more. As there are no words in our stories, each group builds their own according to their own life experiences, letting them build a bond and talk about their feelings and lives.



Getting your Book Club started

There are just three things you need to get going:

1. People

First things first - to have a Book Club, you need to have members! If you're from an organisation or you're a parent or carer, you may already have some members in mind, but it's always good to see if there is anyone else in your area who might want to come along.

If you're looking for members, try reaching out to local self-advocacy groups, charities, colleges, libraries, family support groups or the local council.

Use our poster template to advertise in your community spaces, libraries or notice boards, or post on social media.

You can also get in touch with us at bookclubs@booksbeyondwords.co.uk and we will let you know if we know anyone in the area who might want to join.



2. Place

An accessible place to host your Book Club is next on the list. You may have a place in mind already.

Lots of our Book Clubs take place in local libraries. Libraries are a great place to ask for some space to host as they are usually accessible, free and may be happy to support with their own network of volunteers. You can find your local library by going to <https://www.gov.uk/local-library-services> and entering your post code.

If you don't have a library near you there are lots of other options. You could try a cafe, a community arts space, book shops or even a local leisure centre. See what's available for you and your group.



3. Our Book Club Starter Kit

Our free kit has everything you need to get started. Inside you'll find posters, lanyards, stickers and 30 books. Have an idea for something else that could be included? Email us at bookclubs@booksbeyondwords.co.uk

Running your Book Club

How your Book Club works will be up to you and your group. Different things will work for different groups of people depending on your own needs, backgrounds and communication skills. We have provided a basic idea of what an average Book Club might look like below, to help you get started.

1. Arrive at the venue and say hello to all your members, recording everyone's name. Give them a sticker and ask them to record how they are feeling on the sticker chart. If someone is nervous or unsure, say it's fine for them to just watch.
2. Sit in a circle, all facing each other so you can see each others' books and faces as you read.
3. Go around the circle and introduce everyone to one another, especially any new members.
4. Introduce this week's book and let everyone know about anything they may find emotional.
5. Ask a volunteer to read the first page (or read this page yourself), then continue around the circle with each person reading one page by telling each other what they can see. This builds the story using everyone's experiences. Continue until the story is finished - or finish next time if you need to.
6. Agree a book to read next time the Club meets.
7. Give everyone another sticker and ask them to record their feelings on the feelings chart now Book Club is over. Fill out our photo permissions form if you have taken pictures.
8. Everyone says their goodbyes and goes home!
9. Scan your QR code on your badge and fill in the attendance form, making sure to upload photos of your before and after feelings charts.



How to read our books

When you're first starting out, reading books with no words can feel daunting or strange. Our below guide on how to read our books can help make you feel more comfortable.

Start at the beginning and encourage the reader to hold the book and turn the pages themselves. Everyone can tell the story they see in their own way – with words, signs, facial expressions or whatever works for them. Whether you are reading the book with one person or with a group, encourage them to tell the story in their own words. You will discover what each person thinks is happening, what they already know and how they feel. You may think something different is happening in the pictures yourself, but that doesn't matter. Their interpretation tells you about their life experience.

Some people will follow the story without any problems. If a picture is more difficult, it can help to prompt with open questions, gradually going deeper into the meaning, for example:

- I wonder who that is?
- I wonder what is happening?
- What is he or she doing now?
- I wonder how he or she is feeling?
- Have you felt like that? Has it happened to you/your friend/your family?

You don't have to read the whole story in one sitting. Allow people time to follow the pictures at their own pace. Stay longer with any pictures they are drawn to.



Top tips

- Make sure everyone knows how to contact you and the place the Book Club meets in case anyone has any problems.
- At the start and end of the club it is good to have lots of time to say hello and goodbye individually, as well as to talk about anything that may be important, like things that have come up while you've been discussing the books.
- Visit a Book Club that is already running, whether in person or via Zoom. Beyond Words can help arrange this for you. It will help you become more confident in delivering your own sessions.
- Try to read the chosen book before the Club meets. This will help you develop your own visual literacy and anticipate any feelings that may come up.
- Stay in touch with Beyond Words. If things are tricky or if you have things to celebrate, we can help and would love to promote what you are doing! We'll be in touch at the one month, three months and six months marks to provide any help we can.



- Use our photo permissions form and take photos of your Book Club enjoying themselves.
- Be open and try new things - some of our groups even draw their own stories to read together.
- It's important to read our **Safeguarding Policy** and to make sure that you and any other volunteers are DBS checked. Host organisations will often do this themselves. Get in touch with the email on the next page to find out more.

Keeping in touch

Our team are always happy to help you with anything you need - and we love hearing how our Book Clubs are doing.

You can get in touch by emailing bookclubs@booksbeyondwords.co.uk, calling **01372 234100** or sending post to **Books Beyond Words CIO, 43 High Street, Leatherhead KT22 8AE**. Find our Safeguarding Policy and other helpful resources on our website: booksbeyondwords.co.uk/bciab

Social media and website

We would love to advertise your Book Club and share news about it on our social media accounts and our website. If you have any photos, news or are doing anything exciting with your group please don't hesitate to get in touch.

You can follow us on our social media networks:



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