



Top Ten Book Club Reads

We've taken the hard work out of choosing your next book club selection with our top ten book club titles for 2009. These books have all the ingredients for robust discussion and are guaranteed to have you talking through the night. Enjoy!

The Good Parents, the latest offering from gifted novelist **Joan London**, is an insightful vision of contemporary Australia explored through the timeless story of a runaway girl. 18-year-old Maya leaves country-town Western Australia for the big city lights of Melbourne in search of her own identity and a reality different from rural life. When her parents come to stay with her in Melbourne they find she has gone away and no one knows where she is. Maya's disappearance acts as a catalyst, forcing her parents to reassess their own lives, dreams, past choices and the irrevocable consequences of their decisions. Joan London writes with a wealth of **human understanding**, elegantly capturing our desire to escape the shadow of our parents and forge a personal identity in the wider world.

Indulge in the dazzling lyricism and imagery of Ireland's most **exhilarating prose** stylist, **Sebastian Barry**. Shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize, ***The Secret Scripture*** delves into the hidden corners of Irish society and Catholic morality as Rosanne McNulty, nearing her 100th birthday, discloses a journal she has kept for decades. Roseanne's story reveals an unspoken social history – women 'disappeared' into asylums and convents for the 'crimes' of falling pregnant outside of wedlock or being abandoned by their husbands. As always, Sebastian Barry confronts readers with themes of family fracture, local quarrels and tribal loyalties, as well as revealing the depth and resilience of the human spirit.

Succumb to the lure of Ithaca, the island of Homer's *Odyssey* that has beguiled readers for millennia, in **Arnold Zable's** dazzling new novel of dislocation and exile. ***The Sea of Many Returns*** takes us on one extended family's voyage of discovery to modern-day Ithaca – to its mountains, villages and harbours and into the houses of its people. Arnold Zable's writing focuses on journeys, both physical and emotional, as characters strive to determine their innate identities and achieve a sense of belonging. Written with a strong narrative voice, this novel is a **profound meditation** on displacement and nostalgia.

Fall in love with the magical and charming story of ***The Good Mayor***, set in a little town in a forgotten part of the Baltic. This enchanting debut novel by Scottish author **Andrew Nicoll** is a delightful exploration of **language and storytelling**. Set in a town called Dot on the banks of the Ampersand River, we follow the fortunes of good and honest mayor Tibor Krovic as narrated by Walpurnia, the town's 1200-year-old patron saint. This is a quirky tale of love in which the telling is as important as the events that happen.

Set in modern-day Afghanistan, the richly metaphoric ***The Wasted Vigil*** explores humanity, memory and the impossibility of destroying history. Described as not merely a novelist but 'an artist and a poet', **Nadeem Aslam** depicts the lives of six diverse characters who intersect in the chaos and destruction wrought by the Taliban. Like the



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country and the homes of its citizens, these characters are broken, in turmoil and attempting to rebuild from the debris of what has come before. **Arresting images** of beauty collide with stark cruelty – stoning, decapitations and murder for having the wrong faith – as the weight of suppressed history seeps into the present. A truly stunning novel.

Move between 19th-century England, South Africa during the Boer War, war-torn Paris and 21st-century London in **Richard Mason's** beautifully crafted novel of family, history and duty. Eloquently exploring the challenging world of the mind, ***The Lighted Rooms*** is a wonderful examination of the complicated relationship between mothers and daughters, the onset of mental collapse and the grief it can cause. Mason writes with an **impressive vibrancy** as he depicts the emotional anguish, love and susceptibility of his flawed, heartbreaking characters.

How the Solider Repairs the Gramophone is the poignant and very funny tale of a young child caught up in the Bosnian conflict. More than just a novel about war, author **Saša Stanišić** has created one of the most endearing and original characters in contemporary fiction, protagonist Aleksandar Krsmanovic: comrade-in-chief of fishing, the best magician in the non-aligned states and painter of unfinished things. This exceptionally powerful novel looks at the ways in which we perceive history and identity and is written with a lightness of touch and wonderful **sense of whimsy**.

Festival favourite **Kate Grenville** follows her acclaimed and **controversial** novel *The Secret River* with a return to the early history of European settlement in Australia in ***The Lieutenant***. Exploring the lost potential of constructive black-white relations in this country, she crafts an elegantly written story that follows a bookish second lieutenant and his relationship with an Indigenous girl. Using his real diaries, Kate Grenville builds a clear and real portrait of William Dawes, a member of the First Fleet who was an astronomer, maths scholar and linguist able to learn the Gadigal language and communicate with Australia's native people. This is a moving, not to be missed novel with insights into history, moral dilemmas and human structures of order.

Lovers of fast-paced compelling mysteries are in for a treat with ***Bright Air*** by one of Australia's finest crime writers, **Barry Maitland**. With penetrating psychological insights and realistically flawed characters, Barry Maitland investigates the relationships within a group of six friends who share an intense and obsessive love of climbing. As they delve into the death of a member of their group, secrets and lies lead to a deadly, dangerous trail. A brilliant exploration of inner conflicts in a challenging environment, this novel also captures the **beauty and fragility** of the physical landscape.

Susan Duncan inspired readers with her much loved memoir *Salvation Creek: An Unexpected Life*, her inspiring journey of courage and survival in the face of overwhelming odds. ***The House*** details the next chapter in her life, set against the backdrop of the small, close-knit Pittwater community with its colourful characters and quirky history. This is book about relationships, but it's also about stepping out of your comfort zone and **living life to the full** at any age. It is about the adventure that lurks in every moment, if you want to search for it.