

Book Groups

READING GROUP

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We can never decide if we're a reading group that likes to eat or an eating group that likes to read, so we affectionately started referring to ourselves as the *Reading Group*. We are three couples in Massachusetts, who have known each other for over 30 years, since our children were young. About 10 years ago, we began a new adventure, when we started reading together.

We read all of our books aloud. Our first spontaneous read-aloud happened when just four of us decided to pass the time on a road trip by reading aloud. What fun we had reading Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible!* We spent two extra days together, when we got home, just to finish it! Soon after, we invited another couple to join in and launched our first official read-aloud: *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* by David Wroblewski, then a recent book selection in Oprah's Book Club. During the 10 years since, while we ate and read books together, we also shared in each other's significant family events—retirements, weddings, funerals, and births—and we have developed close relationships, as a result. This has contributed greatly to our enjoyment, understanding, and selection of the books we read.

We have read more than 40 books since we began reading aloud in 2009, including contemporary fiction, science fiction, historical fiction, nonfiction, poetry, a play, essays, and a memoir, but our favorites have been some of the great classics. These include *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens, *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville, and *Absalom, Absalom!* by William Faulkner. We have found the rich language, the depth of characters, and the finely woven story lines to be unmatched by many contemporary titles, although we have fully enjoyed a variety of other wonderful reads: *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* by Erik Larson, *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole, *The Maytrees* by Annie Dillard, and *The Sparrow* by Mary Doria Russell. We have also explored varied cultures and discussed immigration experiences, dictatorship, and racism through books such as *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, *The Year of the Runaways* by Sunjeev Sahota, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI* by David



Grann, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and *The Autumn of the Patriarch* by Gabriel García Márquez.

Over the years, we have received many questions about how and why we read aloud together. Here are some brief responses:

Why read aloud?

We love being read to. Don't we all, since childhood? It is a nurturing and loving thing to do with and for others. Reading aloud slows us down and allows us to savor the language and images in a book. Reading aloud also brings the internal reflections and questions, as we read into shared space for discussion, inquiry, and meaning making. We make comments and ask questions freely throughout our reading together. These involve efforts to recall characters and events, to clarify the meaning of unfamiliar words, to identify emerging themes, and to draw connections to our lives, as well as to other books we have read. We explore the meaning of story events and characters' motives, consider foreshadowed events, and parse out how the author is using

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