

# Book Groups

## SERBICA BOOK GROUP

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### Tell us about your book group.

Our book club is different, because it is devoted to books written in Serbian or to novels by leading international writers that have been translated into Serbian. This February, we will have our 200th meeting and our 19th anniversary. Our meetings are conducted in Serbian.

### How did the group get started?

It began in 1999, when a large group of immigrants from the war-torn Yugoslavia came to Canada. There are many Canadian book clubs but none in the language of the new arrivals. Rade Baturan, a new recent arrival and I, Canadian born, came up with the idea for this “different” book club. We approached Zivko and Olga Apic of Serbica Books, and they kindly consented to host the club in their bookstore, which was later taken over by the second generation, Patrick and Tamara Apic. Since the bookstore’s closing a few months ago, we meet in a local library.

### Who are your members, and how are the meetings structured?

Our members range in age from the 40s to the mid-80s. Many are retired professionals who have made Canada their home in their golden years. All are avid readers, and their knowledge of international books is vast. There are about 17 core members, with others joining in from time to time. We meet once a month throughout the year. The evening opens with introductory remarks about the selected book’s author; then a facilitator/moderator guides the members through their discussion/conversation, with all members taking part.

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### How do you choose the book?

Members suggest monthly selections, which range from classics to contemporary novels. Traditionally, each year’s selection includes the winner of Serbia’s prestigious NIN Award for Best Novel, a Nobel Prize laureate, a novel in Serbian translation, and an evening of poetry, with the members reading and discussing their favorite poems. So far, the club has discussed 47 classics of Serbian literature, novels and poems by 83 contemporary Serbian writers, 18 NIN Award winners, works by 9 Nobel laureates, 23 international books in Serbian translation, and 11 books by Serbian writers of the diaspora. A special evening was devoted to Canadian literature because the members wanted to know more about the literature of the country they are now calling home.

### Which books led to your best discussion?

*Montenegro* by Starling Lawrence (our first selection), *Dictionary of the Khazars* by Miodrag Pavić, *The Bridge on the Drina* by Ivo Andrić, *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, *My Name Is Red* by Orhan Pamuk, *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* by Tracy Chevalier, *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini were discussed at length and became club favorites.

### What books did not work well for your group?

Surprisingly, a lot of the members disliked *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafon, while others liked it, so it led to a lively discussion. Other members did not like or finish Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*. ■