

BOOK CLUBS PROVIDE COMMUNITY CONNECTION TO AVID READERS AROUND THE NORTH COUNTRY

By **Holly Riddle**

We have people who say it's their one day of the month that they can take for themselves," described Elisa McIntosh, one of the organizers behind the Sara-Placid Silent Book Club. "This has created a space for people to take time for themselves."

It's something that's repeated over and over again when you talk to book club organizers throughout the North Country. These clubs provide a community and self-care opportunity to individuals looking for an easy and convenient way to connect with others over something they love, while also enjoying a hobby that's accessible and relatively affordable.

For Elisa McIntosh of The Bookstore Plus, Jessie Fischer of the Saranac Lake Book Nook and Carolyn Bordonaro of Origin Coffee Co., all of whom pulled their combined resources to create the Sara-Placid Silent Book Club, accessibility and convenience were key considerations in choosing to host a silent book club versus a traditional book club. In silent book clubs, members gather to read silently for a set amount of time — any book that they want to bring with them — and loose conversation can meander in any direction.

"It's a low-pressure, welcoming environment and perfect for introverts and busy people that just want the time and the place to sit down and enjoy their reading. It's very relaxing. There's no obligation for you to even finish a book...and there's no pressure for discussion either," described Fischer.

According to Bordonaro, who hosts the book club at either Origin Coffee Co.'s Saranac Lake or Lake Placid location, alternating monthly, the idea fit right within the business's ethos. "Our coffee shop mission is about providing a space for community to come and hang out. We're all about fostering that sense of community and making sure we have a place where people feel welcome and can gather and socialize while also enjoying our beverages," she said. "[The silent book club] was a perfect fit."



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Similarly, the Chapter One Book Club in Plattsburgh, held every second Tuesday of the month at Chapter One Coffee & Tea, was born out of the business's desire to build community (and to provide a non-alcohol-based social function), tapping Katrina Rigsbee and Cari Dominic to organize the club in 2022.

"I think 60 people showed up for the first one. I was shocked," Rigsbee joked. "I literally set up 10 chairs."

Now, the book club has established a firm base of regular attendees, while also frequently welcoming new faces. In addition to monthly meetings, the club also hosts extra events such as book swaps, poetry readings and similar literary-leaning activities.

"It's a space for people of all ages," said Rigsbee. "I now see people from book club all around town and I feel so much more at home here... I feel more grounded in the community because of the book club and I think a lot of people who come also feel that way."

"There are so many people from Plattsburgh that you never really would've crossed paths with, likely, if it hadn't been for the book club," added Dominic.



■ **THE SARA-PLACID SILENT BOOK CLUB AT ORIGIN COFFEE CO.** Providing a space for the community to come and hang out. (Facebook, used by permission)



■ **THE CHAPTER ONE BOOK CLUB AT CHAPTER ONE COFFEE & TEA.** Born out of the business's desire to build community. (Photos provided)

A BOOK CLUB FOR EVERY READER

Sometimes, book clubs form not just because the organizers want to develop a greater sense of community in general, but because they're simply dying to talk to other readers about their greatest and latest read or a very specific genre — but those strong community bonds arise all the same.

Such was the case at both Kay'Z Boba in Plattsburgh, where a book club sprang up in late 2024, and at Adirondack Winery in Lake George, which has hosted a book club since early 2024.

"I really needed an outlet, to talk to someone about the most recent book I had read," said Amber Fahlmann, the winery's events coordinator. She posted on social media asking if people would be interested in a book club. Now, the winery hosts two separate book clubs (one "traditional" club that meets every month and one dedicated to spicy books that meets quarterly) and a Facebook group dedicated to the events with about 450 members.

"It's a very strong group of dedicated women who just want to come and chitchat about books," said Fahlmann. "Most of the time, we're talking about the book we just read, but a lot of times we're also talking about what's going on in each other's lives."

Since, currently, the book club draws large groups of about 40–50 attendees, members reserve their spot for each meeting. Attendees are assigned seats at tables and the winery serves a themed drink for each book. Small groups go through discussion questions and then there's a planned activity.



■ **READ BETWEEN THE VINES BOOK CLUB AT ADIRONDACK WINERY.** Created as an outlet for women to discuss books and enjoy themed wine. (Photos provided)

"The friendships and community I've seen grow within the girls... I'm providing a space, but they're doing all the hard work and stepping out of their comfort zones. We have a lot of moms for whom, book club is their one thing that they do for themselves," said Fahlmann. "Also, the reading, taking that time every day to just read a book and have some quiet time for yourself, is so important."

At Kay'Z Boba, owner Kayler Grizzle said, "I'm obsessed with reading and wanted more people to talk about books with. Most of the book clubs in the area are all usually literary fiction or non-fiction. I'm a fantasy and romance girly, so I wanted [a book club] where I could be passionate about the books."

The boba shop's book club follows a relatively informal format, with members voting on trending books to read as a group, but no strict requirement related to discussion questions or meeting schedules. The shop prepares a themed beverage for each book club, and Grizzle tries to do some sort of giveaway or décor themed around the month's book, too.

Like the Kay'Z Boba book club is focused in on a particular type of book, so is the Champlain Area Trails (CATS) Conservation Book Club — but where you might find spicy reads at the former, the latter fits in nicely with the organization's overall mission to connect people to nature.

"We're really open-minded about what that [mission] looks like," CATS Community Engagement & Outreach Manager Torey Patenaude said. "It's not saying that you have to hike, and a huge part of what we do is not only offering hiking programming. [The book club] is a fantastic way to connect people to nature through reading and then discussion."

The book club's format, taking place both in person in differing spots around the Champlain Area region and over Zoom, is likewise inclusive. The club reads a variety of books with an environmental slant, both fiction and non-fiction.

"People in the book club host, all around the Champlain Valley," Patenaude continued, providing an example. "One of the people in our book club lives right next to a CATS trail that has beavers. We were reading 'Beaverland' by Leila Philip, and so she hosted because we could look over the pond there, and people could come early and hike if they wanted."

"My job was created to connect people to nature, and the book club is a pretty integral part of that," she added. 🍷

LOOKING FOR YOUR NEXT READ?

HERE'S WHAT THESE BOOK CLUB ORGANIZERS RECOMMEND

- **Elisa McIntosh recommends** *"Keep This for Me"* by Jennifer Fawcett
- **Jessie Fischer recommends** *"Lula Dean's Little Library of Banned Books"* by Kirsten Miller
- **Cari Dominic recommends** *"I'm Glad My Mom Died"* by Jennette McCurdy
- **Katrina Rigsby recommends** *"Our Wives Under the Sea"* by Julia Armfield
- **Amber Fahlmann recommends** *"God of the Woods"* by Liz Moore
- **Kayler Grizzle recommends** *"How My Neighbor Stole Christmas"* by Meghan Quinn
- **Torey Patenaude recommends** *"Birding to Change the World: A Memoir"* by Trish O'Kane



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