

## WHY TALK ABOUT BOOKS?

Gary Warren Niebuhr  
Greendale Public Library  
5647 Broad Street  
Greendale, WI 53129  
(414) 423-2136 ext. 225  
[gary.niebuhr@mcfls.org](mailto:gary.niebuhr@mcfls.org) (work—for library stuff)  
[piesbook@execpc.com](mailto:piesbook@execpc.com) (home—for workshop bookings)  
<http://my.execpc.com/~piesbook/piescatalog.html>

Make Mine a Mystery: A Reader's Guide to Mystery and  
Detective Fiction (Libraries Unlimited, 978-1563087844)

Read 'Em Their Writes: A Handbook for Mystery and Crime  
Fiction Book Discussions (Libraries Unlimited, 978-  
1591583035)



- The benign dictator
- Rotating the responsibility
  - No leader
- The hired gun



- The benign dictator**  
you can just pick a book. Love me or  
leave me. Problem solved.
- Rotating responsibility**  
he/she can choose the title
- No leader**  
each member can suggest titles that  
go into a pool from which  
new books to discuss are  
picked  
a survey can be created and the  
group can hold an election for  
the titles to be read.
- The hired gun**  
those hiring him/her can select the title  
the hired gun should have titles to  
suggest



**What type of reading the  
group will be doing**

**The theme defines what type  
of books will be read by all  
each session**

**The availability of the title**

**The timing of book selection**



**WHO?  
WHERE?  
WHEN?  
HOW?**



- A list of characters
- A one sentence synopsis of the plot developments in each chapter
- Unfamiliar terms, languages, locations, or historical references in the text
- Quotes from the text
- The questions to ask the group



- The author
- The book
- The reviews
- The genre



**AVOID:** Can Gary be blamed for the consequences of his actions?

Answer: Yes.

Answer: No.

**BETTER:** Why can Gary be blamed for the consequences of his actions?

Answer: Because...



- FOLLOW UP:  
Is it fair that Gary is blamed for the consequences of his actions?"

- FOLLOW UP:  
Does everyone else agree with that?



- ACADEMIC:  
Does Gary's inability to accept the consequences of his own actions echo Shakespeare's theme in *Hamlet*?

- BETTER:  
Does Gary's inability to accept the consequences of his own actions remind you of any books you have read?



Were the characters  
believable?

To which character could you most  
relate?

Was the plot believable?

What scene from this book do you like  
most—or least?

Did the book's setting enhance the  
story?



What do you think happened to  
these characters after the  
book ended?

How did you feel at the end of the  
book?

Was order restored to this world at the  
end of the novel?

Was justice obtained at the end of the  
novel?

Did you enjoy the author's style?



What do you think the title meant?

What was the book's theme?

Did the theme affect any of the main characters?

Can you name another book that this book compares to?

Would you read another book by this author?



- Standard follow-up questions for all responses by participants:

Why?

Does everyone agree with that?

- Standard follow up when a participant raises their own question to you:

What do you think?

- Standard filler question

Who would you cast in the movie version of this book?



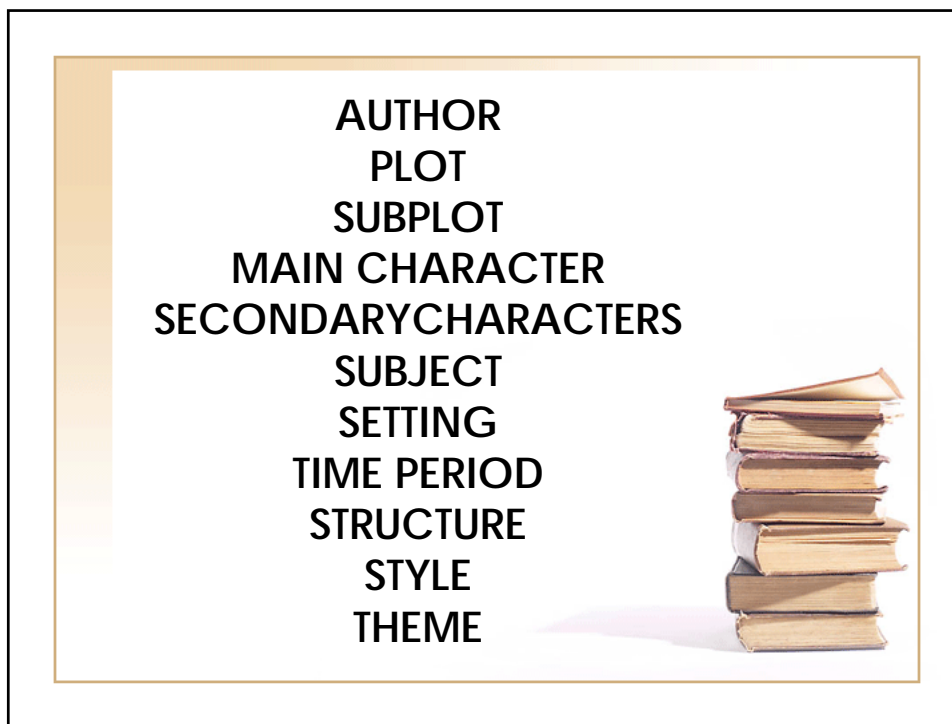
- **Introductions**
- **About the book**
- **About the author**
- **Get to the questions**



**Obtaining and reading the book prior to the discussion**  
**Coming to the discussion willing to share opinions**  
**Coming to the discussion willing to listen to the opinions of the other participants**







A portrait of Sandra Balzo, a woman with short brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark top. The photo is set against a background that includes a sign that says "CAFE LATTE". To the right of the portrait is a stack of approximately ten old, worn books.

**Sandra Balzo**  
**Uncommon Grounds**

Sandra Balzo lives in Brookfield, Wisconsin, with her husband and two children. Sandra spent twenty years in public relations, publicity and event management before forming her own public relations company, Balzo Communications. She is an active member of the fan mystery community and has worked on many of the Bouchercon: World Mystery Conventions. Her first short story, *The Grass Is Always Greener* (2003) was nominated for an Anthony Award and won the Robert L. Fish Award and a Macavity Award for Best Short Story. Her second story, *Viscary*, was an Anthony nominee and won the Derringer Award.

Website: <http://www.sandrabalzo.com>.

Reader's Guide:  
<http://www.sandrabalzo.com/readinggroup.html>.

Readalikes:  
 Donna Andrews  
 Cleo Coyle (Coffeehouse Mystery Series)  
 Dianne Mott Davidson  
 Joan Hess

Your Name and Your Contact Information  
 Photo courtesy of Lisa Balzo