

# Help With Book Groups

by Ranae Burdette of Eagle Harbor Book Company on Bainbridge Island, WA

Here at Eagle Harbor Book Company on Bainbridge Island we support or over 35 regional book groups. In “The Nook,” a cozy cove near the store’s front entrance, book group selections are displayed along with Booksense Bestsellers, Staff Picks, and reading group resources, including recommended reading lists, readers guides, and information about book group related activities such as “Seattle Reads” and Harper Collins “Invite the Author” program.

Oprah’s Book Group did boost the national popularity of book groups, but many of our local groups were established well before this recent surge of interest. While most of the groups registered with us are private, our store and several other organizations and individuals do sponsor groups that are open to the public. We support these groups as well, and for anyone who wishes to form or join a new group, we provide a “Looking for a Book Group?” registry.

Behind the scenes, a comprehensive tracking system allows us to order, display, and return reading group selections in a timely manner. To assist everyone involved, from the orderers to the customers, we maintain a “Book Group Binder” in which pertinent information—group name, contact person, number of members, monthly selections, and discussion dates—regarding each group is entered. We also flag current book group titles in our Books In Store/Point of Sale database. Several groups submit a list of their entire year’s selections, while many choose their books month to month. In either case, for shelving space and for returns purposes, we try to stock and display their choices between one and two months ahead of their discussion date. For the final touch, we use letterhead display cards to identify each group’s books and meeting dates.

We have yet to devise a system for tracking revenue generated specifically from book group sales, as it is not unusual for titles, especially bestsellers and new release paperbacks, to be shelved in multiple locations. And, of course, customers who purchase book group books from the nook are not necessarily book group members.

In the areas of marketing and events, we aim for a mutually beneficial relationship with book groups. For example, several times each year, we create bookmarks listing upcoming events deemed of particular interest to book groups and insert these bookmarks into the current book group selections on display. For the past four years, we have hosted an evening with Nancy Pearl, past Executive Director of the Washington Center for the Book, also known as our “Book Group Night,” at which we distribute the latest book group resource information, survey the audience for feedback on our book group services, and raffle bestsellers and Nancy Pearl recommended titles. Currently, we are composing our first “Book Group News” electronic newsletter, which will go out to customers and book group members who have registered email addresses with us.

And, just for fun, what started out four years ago as a store newsletter item has become our “Eagle Harbor Book Company Annual Favorite Book Group Book Survey.” In December we make balloting available to all registered book groups, in person, via email, or by phone. Results are published in our spring newsletter. Whereas the number one picks in the past have been predictable popular bestsellers—*The Poisonwood Bible*, *Girl With the Pearl Earring*, *Peace Like a River*, and *The Life of Pi*—the diversity of our readership is illustrated by a sampling of the runners-up, which have included *Fast Food Nation*, *The Professor and the Madman*, and *Guns, Germs, & Steel*. To discover this year’s winner and to learn more about our store, visit us online at [www.eagleharborbooks.com](http://www.eagleharborbooks.com). And, of course, if you’re ever in the neighborhood, drop in, say hello, and visit “The Nook.” It’s a great place to browse!

*Ranae Burdette is the Book Group Coordinator at Eagle Harbor Book Company on Bainbridge Island, WA. Contact her at 206-842-5332 or [staff@eagleharborbooks.com](mailto:staff@eagleharborbooks.com).*