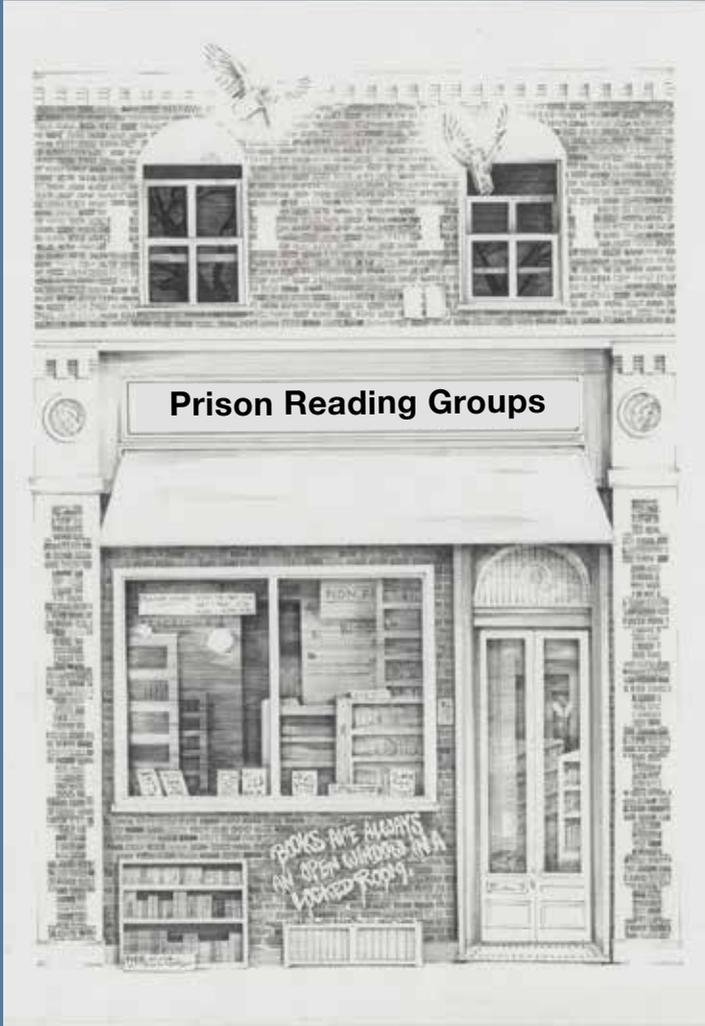


Prison Reading Groups 2025



What we do

In 2025:

7500+

books

75+

groups in

50+

prisons

20+

RtW groups



'The group makes you feel more like you belong.'

Member

'Book club allows the exercise of mental muscles that would otherwise weaken.'

Member

Reading groups

PRG has been setting up, funding and supporting reading groups for over 25 years. The groups are voluntary and flexible so they can be adapted to individual prison needs. There are no tests and no right/wrong answers, just a chance to get together for sociable book talk. Groups choose the books they read and members are given new copies to keep or pass on to others.



Reading the Way

These are targeted groups for prisoners who feel they struggle with reading and lack confidence. The groups use short texts and those who want to are encouraged to read aloud. But the emphasis is also on discussion in a relaxed setting and with others who also feel they need support.



Community, Connection and Change

PRG evaluation report

The evaluation was commissioned to test out the aims of PRG and to learn more about what members enjoy and value about the groups. The findings confirm core PRG principles and provide rich individual responses.



Becoming a reader

Choosing what they read increases the sense of agency and participation, and being given a brand new book can have far-reaching effects.

'A clean copy makes me feel I have some ownership of my opinions.'



Community

The groups create supportive communities that help overcome the isolation of prison and build relationships based on better understanding of other people's views.

'I see myself as a more open-minded person who can relate to others.'

Connection

Family

The groups help strengthen family bonds. Book talk can break the ice in phone calls and create common ground.

'My partner reads a lot and now we have more to talk about.'

'I don't want to give up reading after this. My mum thanked me for reading again – she got the audio book to read along with me.'

The wider world

Prisoners are cut off from wider society and this can lead to a loss of interest in it. Reading, discussion and debate are forms of participation that connect members with the world outside and the issues we all face as citizens.

'It keeps us reminded that we are still part of a wider society.'

The report was launched at the House of Lords for an audience that included ministers, MPs and policy makers from the Ministry of Justice.

Challenge, confidence and change

The isolation of prison can disconnect prisoners from a sense of themselves and this has damaging effects on mental health and rehabilitation.

'The group has reminded me who I am.'

Reading groups build confidence and a belief in the possibility of change. They also foster the reflection needed to turn a life around.

'I am more confident, I can speak my mind more and I matter.'

'I never saw myself as a reader of books and am now proud to think that I am and recognise how this has helped me to expand my horizons and myself.'



What Groups Read



The wide variety of book choices confirms the ambition of PRG groups and their determination to 'get out of the comfort zone'.

Disagreement is the lifeblood of any good discussion and there's always plenty of it, from 'best book we've ever read in the group' to 'I'd rather eat my own eyeballs than have to read this again'.

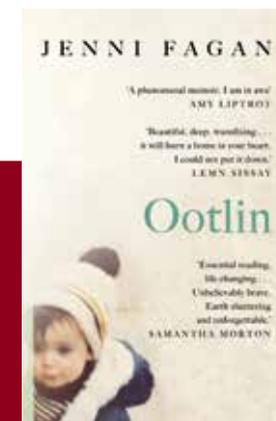
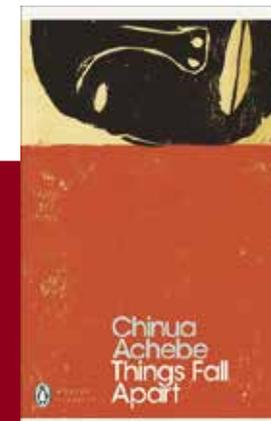
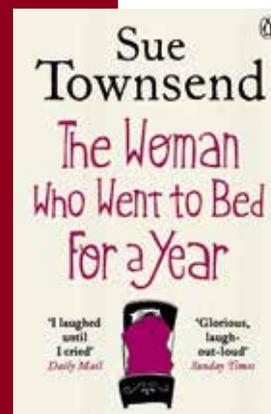
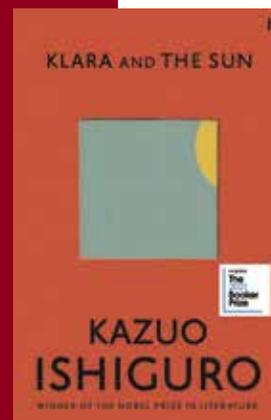
Here's a snapshot of recent books from two monthly groups.

Category B men's prison

Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These*
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun*
Cormac McCarthy, *No Country for Old Men*
Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Women's prison

Peter James, *One of Us is Dead*
Jenni Fagan, *Ootlin*
Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These*
Sue Townsend, *The Woman Who Went to Bed for a Year*



PRG resources



PRG provides resources to promote reading throughout the prison.

Bookstuff is our fortnightly handout of book trivia that prisoners can pick up from the library or the wings. We have produced over 100 of these, many put together by PRG volunteers.

Finding a Good Read is our monthly column in Inside Time, the national newspaper for prisoners. Each one highlights a genre or a theme or a single writer and gives thumbnail sketches of a range of related titles. Every quarter we welcome a Fellow from the **Royal Society of Literature** as guest editor.

Feedback from the groups is PRG's lifeblood and we share it in **Reading Group Roundup**, another Inside Time column that spotlights a different group each time and offers a snapshot of the discussion and lively debate.

Book Talk is a monthly website resource that highlights two book titles that groups might want to consider. Alongside a brief summary of each book there are discussion questions for those who want them. It's especially useful for remote PRG groups which can't meet face to face but want to share views.



Finding a Good Read
A column to help you find intriguing books



Libraries and volunteers



Sebastian Faulks and HMP Wandsworth

'The prisoners found themselves reflecting on thought-provoking questions about morality, humanity and ultimately what defines us as human beings... a lot to think about!'

Library staff member on a visit from Sebastian Faulks (pictured)

Libraries are at the heart of all good prisons and library staff are key partners for PRG. Their commitment to spreading the pleasures and benefits of reading ensure that our reading groups are well-publicised and promoted. They are crucial inside contacts and they often run the groups themselves with infectious enthusiasm. The feedback from one of our librarians after a play-reading with the group says it all:

'One of the best mornings ever – I was literally crying with laughter...And one of the men said afterwards "such good fun – who would have thought it?"'

We also support library staff to put on **author events** for the whole prison. This year visitors have included Robert Harris, Sebastian Faulks and Helen Lederer.

PRG volunteers are invaluable and we are very grateful for their determination and commitment even in the face of lockdowns, clearance delays and regime changes. They produce resources and they facilitate many of the groups. Our evaluation report confirms how important they are to prisoners as a link to the outside world and re-assurance that they haven't been forgotten.

'Our volunteer brings knowledge, civility and calm into a place that struggles to be any of these things.'



www.prisonreadinggroups.org.uk

112-114 Holland Park Avenue
London W11 4UA



info@giveabook.org.uk

Prison Reading Groups is part of Give a Book.
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