

(2.12.09 Book Club Close-up)

Readers in the Hood, Northern California

We will kick off this column by profiling my very own neighborhood book club, *Readers in the Hood* from Northern California. We would love to interview your group for future features in this column. Please contact us.

How long has your group been together? *Readers in the Hood* started almost six years ago as a neighborhood book club. Our founder, The Book Club Cheerleader, began the group as a way to get to know the neighbors while providing some intellectual (read ‘anything adult’) conversation. This had become necessary since she had recently left her Fortune 500 job and was spending her days raising a teenage boy—who called her “Dude”—and coaching a teenaged cheer squad who majored in giggling. Since that time, we’ve grown into a tight-knit group who not only reads together, but also socializes and supports local charities together. Learn more about some of our favorite ways of giving back to our community—while having fun together—by visiting our website at www.readersinthehood.com.

Where do you usually meet? We rotate our regular book discussion meetings at members’ homes in our neighborhood. This works great in case a *Hoodie* has had one too many glasses of chardonnay—she can just walk home. When we invite guests to our author celebrations, however, we move to larger venues.

What are some of your group's favorite books? Wow—we have read so many good books that generated great discussions! Some of our favorites would have to include: *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd; *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini; *The Madonnas of Leningrad*, by Debra Dean; *My Sister’s Keeper*, by Jodi Picoult; *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, by Mary Ann Shaffer & Annie Barrows; *The Glass Castle*, by Jeanette Walls; *East of Eden*, by John Steinbeck; *Honeymoon with My Brother*, by Franz Wisner, and *The Color of Water*, by James McBride.

What's on your reading list this year? We’re really excited about this year’s selections. They seem to all be following the same theme: Adventure! Our list for spring includes: *Song Yet Sung*, our second James McBride novel; *Away*, by Amy Bloom (and boy, does she go away); and *People of the Book*, by Geraldine Brooks (a reprise for this wonderful author, as well.)

How does your book club decide what to read next? We choose our book selections two to three months in advance by a group vote. Everyone suggests a

book or two and then we 'round robin' the room voting for our favorites. This allows everyone to share in the responsibility of recommending books and to have an equal voice in book selections. We like the two to three month timeline because it gives us enough advance time to fully digest a book and, when we hear about a great book, we don't have to wait until the next year to read it.

Are you planning any special trips or events around a book you're reading?

We are visiting New York City in May, and are reading a deliciously funny book, *Memoirs of a Beautiful Boy*, that is partially set in the city. While we're there, we are having lunch with up-and-coming author, Robert Leleux, to discuss his book with him. After reading his book, we can't wait to meet him!

Actually, *Readers in the Hood* is known for our special celebrations. Our motto is, "If you're not willing to go overboard, don't get on the frickin' boat." We celebrate some of our favorite books—such as *The Secret Life of Bees*, when we held our own 'Daughters of Mary' meeting, complete with Lunelle-hats and a Black Madonna altar. We celebrate authors—such as the time we threw a wedding reception (with a double-groom-topped wedding cake) for *Honeymoon with My Brother* author, Franz Wisner. Check out our website to see some of our other celebrations, such as Lisa See (*Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*), John Lescroart (*Betrayal*), and Karen Joy Fowler (*The Jane Austen Book Club*) at www.readersinthehood.com. Our only regret, is that we can't invite Jane Austen, John Steinbeck—or now, John Updike to come to one of our over-the-top meetings to celebrate them!

BCC

