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One of the major challenges confronting South Africa today is the staggeringly high illiteracy rate and this demands a robust reading campaign. Literacy underpins growth in various aspects of our lives and is central to our development as a nation. The creation of a reading culture therefore becomes one of the integral elements in our project of nation-building.

In line with the national vision of building a cohesive, caring and sustainable society as enunciated in our government’s Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), the national Department of Arts and Culture undertakes to work towards the establishment of Book Clubs in all sectors of society across the nation. Book Clubs are one of the simplest and most practical mechanisms to encourage the culture of reading while at the same time playing a crucial role in promoting social cohesion.

The Department of Arts and Culture established a Book Club in 2007 and has since hosted interactive and cordial book discussions with over twenty authors. Discussion sessions and public lectures are held regularly to discuss books and share knowledge on positive social values. The Book Club proved to be a powerful vehicle not only in promoting the culture of reading but also in contributing to the broader government imperatives of developing a caring, democratic and cohesive society. An increased culture of reading would contribute to cognitive development especially among the youth and enhance their ability to engage in intellectual discourse.

We embark on this initiative conscious of the fact that there are numerous other efforts aimed at promoting literacy and the culture of reading in South Africa. Our intention is not to reinvent the wheel but to add impetus and contribute significantly to the collective effort of developing a reading nation. In line with the objectives of the Kharir Gude Mass Literacy Campaign led by the Department of Education, the Book Club programme focuses on promoting the culture of reading outside the classroom. We intend to launch an integrated national campaign to encourage all South Africans to start reading for pleasure and not only as a means to obtain a qualification.
This initiative is established at an opportune time when South African literature is taking centre stage at unprecedented heights. As our book sector flourishes, it is imperative that we engender wider audiences and give the various stakeholders all the support they need. As a nation we have the responsibility of supporting our writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians and other role-players along the book value chain. The Department of Arts and Culture, as the custodian for our nation’s heritage, is duty-bound to ensure that books are accessible to all sectors of our society and that no South African is deprived of the right to read.

One of the most demanding aspects of our mandate is encouraging equitable development of all languages recognised by our constitution. It is a point worth noting that despite our constitutional privilege, which recognises eleven official languages, unfortunately indigenous African languages continue to receive a status that is not commendable in society. It is important that we instill on the young minds the love for reading and a sense of identity and pride in our languages. Reading is an important vehicle through which these values can be propagated and transmitted to future generations. Libraries, as custodians of information and knowledge, have the responsibility to ensure that books are accessible to our society. The National Library will coordinate the establishment and running of Book Clubs and similar forms of reading circles in all our public libraries and related community centres across South Africa. The Department is committed to the vision of creating partnerships to develop, preserve and promote the wealth of South Africa’s diverse literary culture. This can only be achieved this through active involvement of communities and meaningful participation of the various stakeholders in the book sector.

This is a call to all government departments, libraries, educational institutions, NGOs, reading programmes, community centres, individuals and all other entities to embark on this ambitious project. I am making this call mindful of the fact that the real revolution in reading does not depend solely on the role played by the government, but on active involvement of the society at large. Let us join hands and work towards building a prosperous nation by encouraging the culture of reading across South Africa.

LULU XINGWANA, MP
MINISTER OF ARTS AND CULTURE
INTRODUCTION

We have emerged from a past where libraries were sparsely located and subsequently became exclusive preserves of minorities. This disparity in development deprived many South Africans the right to read as the library infrastructure was concentrated in the cities. Furthermore, material stocked in these libraries excluded literature by South African writers who were opposed to the dehumanizing system of racial segregation.

South African writers occupied frontline trenches in the fight against apartheid alongside political activists, labour movements and other relevant formations opposed to the system at the time. They employed literature as a tool for raising local, continental and international awareness by documenting and critiquing the gruesome human, socio-economic and political conditions of our people in an oppressive state. Many of these writers were persecuted, forced into exile and their works banned inside South Africa.

The time has come for us to reverse the legacy of our regrettable past and put South African literature at the centre stage in our project of nation-building. The availability of literature by South African writers in our library and information sector is integral in the development of a cohesive society. It is our prerogative as a nation to support our writers and accord them the dignity they deserve as custodians of our cultural heritage. We are duty-bound to ensure that books written by South African writers, both old and new, are available in the public domain through our library and information centres.

The past few years have witnessed the emergence of a galaxy of dynamic South African writers who soon established themselves among the best in the world. These writers have put South Africa on the global map as they continue to win some of the most prestigious literary prizes on the continent and the world over, including the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize, the Noma Award for African Publishing and the Caine Prize for African Writing, among others. The challenge that lies ahead of us is to engender wider audiences for South African literature and develop a globally competitive book sector. This is one way in which we can advance towards our strategic objective of eliminating...
illiteracy in our country.

One of the fundamental aspects of building a progressive society is the development of a reading culture. We regard the establishment of book clubs in various sectors of society across the nation as a critical intervention towards the attainment of this national imperative.

It is often said that “a reading nation is a winning nation” and we believe that with greater commitment to encouraging the culture of reading South Africa will indeed become a winning nation. We urge all South Africans to join hands with government and all relevant institutions in making ours a reading nation.

Government is the largest employer in the country and libraries remain the primary sources of information and knowledge to the public. The strategic importance of these entities in our society cannot be overemphasized. It is against this backdrop that they form part of the key priorities in our reading promotion strategy.

We encourage each and every government department, including the three tiers of government, and all our community libraries to establish book clubs where South African literature will be read and discussed. Book clubs have the potential to spread positive social values and enhance intellectual discourse across the nation.

We appeal to all South Africans, particularly stakeholders along the book value chain, to support the development of South African literature. We believe that the establishment of book clubs is fundamental in the development of a thriving book industry in South Africa. The promotion of local content is a vital ingredient in the development of a truly liberated society.

P. MASHATILE
DEPUTY MINISTER
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

Themba P. Wakashe
Director General: Arts and Culture

The Department of Arts and Culture is committed to the vision of preserving and developing the wealth of South Africa’s diverse literary culture. We believe that literature is a critical tool in the promotion of social cohesion and nation-building and Book Clubs are integral in the advancement of these imperatives.

The DAC Book Club was established in 2007 as a way of encouraging the culture of reading among the employees. After two years of successfully convening regular book discussions, hosting guest authors and public lectures the Book Club proved more than just a leisurely activity. It adds meaningful value in our endeavour to address the lack of a culture of reading, which is one of the pressing challenges that confront us as a nation. It is against this backdrop that we embark on a massive reading campaign using Book Clubs as a means towards the attainment of our national objectives.

The introduction of the Book Club phenomenon in our national reading promotion strategy is aimed at facilitating synergies in our public institutions and ensuring efficient utilisation of available resources to reach all sectors of our society. We create partnerships to ensure effective utilisation of resources towards the preservation, development and promotion of South African literary heritage in both its oral and written forms. We have components such as Cultural Development, National Language Service and Archives, Library and Heraldry sections which all recognise books as a critical tool in social cohesion and nation building.

Officials from the Department of Arts and Culture, the National Library and other associated institutions will be available to work with the various stakeholders in establishing Book Clubs in strategic centers across South Africa. Our public libraries will play a crucial role in providing space and resources in ensuring that there are communal Book Clubs in the various locations where there are existing libraries. In addition to popularising the Book Club phenomenon, plans are in place to establish National Book Week in 2010 and celebrate other relevant days of national and international significance such as the World Book Day in April.
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

and the International Literacy Day in September.

The nexus between our library community, government departments and other public institutions is integral in pursuing the vision of creating a reading nation. Together these entities can be a force that contributes significantly to the imperative of developing a caring society that takes pride in its diverse literary heritage. Any effort that seeks to stimulate the culture of reading is an investment towards building a better quality of life for all.

THEMBA P. WAKASHE
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
The role of libraries in our society is far more than just serving as the repository of books. Libraries as custodians of information and knowledge have the responsibility to align their services with our government’s programme of action and respond to the needs of the society at large.

The imprints of our regrettable apartheid past are still visible in our library and information services which until recently were inaccessible to the majority of our people. As the library and information community in South Africa we have inherited the legacy of under-resourced and sparsely located libraries. The glaring example of this negligence by the apartheid regime is the absence of a community library in Mdantsane, the second biggest township in South Africa.

In a significant effort to address this disparity, the Department of Arts and Culture allocated R1 Billion to revitalise the country’s community libraries to enable the South African society to gain access to knowledge and information that will improve their socio-economic conditions. While we are working hard to ensure the erection of library structures and introducing mobile libraries to bridge the gap that exists in our communities, it is imperative that we also ensure that there is adequate reading material for these communities. We are doing our utmost best to enhance accessibility of information and knowledge to all sectors of our society.

One of the greatest achievements of this intervention by our government is the Reprint of South African Classics Project, which has so far reproduced 27 classical works in the nine previously marginalized indigenous languages. With the help of the Provincial Library Departments and other relevant structures, the reprinted texts have been distributed to libraries across the country. We encourage librarians to supply books written in languages mostly spoken in the communities that they serve.

The challenge that remains now is to ensure that these books are put into good use instead of gathering dust on the library shelves. The establishment of book clubs in the communities is one way in which we can encourage a vibrant culture of reading across South Africa.
MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL LIBRARIAN

Libraries are convenient platforms for the establishment and running of book clubs in the communities.

The National Library together with its associate institutions pledges its unyielding commitment to the vision of creating a reading nation. The Centre for the Book, our outreach unit based in Cape Town, has piloted a number of reading promotion initiatives with laudable success. The Centre for the Book has collaborated with several partners to embark on initiatives to establish reading clubs in public spaces such as schools, trains and correctional centres.

We will continue making interventions to promote the culture of reading and raise awareness about significant days such as the World Book Day, the International Literacy Day and Mother Tongue Day. These days are recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as days when we pay special focus on the promotion of the culture of reading.

The establishment of book clubs in community libraries is one way in which the library and information sector can contribute directly to the national drive of reading promotion. We appeal to all librarians in our country to support this venture by providing space and all manner of support to ensure that reading clubs are established in their communities.

We also make a humble appeal to our esteemed authors to avail themselves to their readers. Interacting with authors not only enhances the passion for books but is a source of inspiration to our writers as well. The visibility of authors at our libraries will definitely play a pivotal role in the development of a reading culture in South Africa.

JOHN K. TSEBE
NATIONAL LIBRARIAN
MEET THE COMMITTEE

Siphiwo Mahala is the founding Chairperson of the DAC Book Club. He joined the Department of Arts and Culture in 2004 as Deputy Director for Books and Publishing. He is the author of several published short stories and his debut novel, When a Man Cries, received the Ernst van Heerden Creative Writing Award.

Tsietsi Winston Dennis Mohapi is a Sesotho writer and translator. He has written a variety of genres for adult and schools of which two received the Mofolo Award and M-Net Book Prize on poetry and a novel. He is the chairman of Sesotho Writer’s Association.
Ayanda August is one of the founding members of the book club. She joined the Department in 2007 as Deputy Director International Conventions before getting a transfer to Deputy Director Legacy Projects within the Heritage Chief Directorate.

Boitumelo Seomana is an analyst programmer, who is currently working in the Information Technology Unit of the department. She is passionate about indigenous language books.

Sibongile Nxumalo became a member of the book club in 2007, shortly after joining the Department. She is a highly motivated and artistically gifted individual.
The official launch of the DAC Book Club held at the State Theatre in November 2007 brought together some of the leading minds in South Africa’s creative sector. This occasion was a demonstration of the high level of commitment by both government and the writing community in the promotion of reading in South Africa.

The launch was addressed by Prof Muxe Nkondo, Chairperson of the National Library Board, and attended by literary activists in the country including Prof DBZ Ntuli, Zukiswa Wanner, Raks Seakhoa, Phillippa Yaa De Villiers, Phakama Mbonambi, to name but a few. A number of distinguished poets including Lebo Mashile, Napo Masheane, Masoja Msiza, etc. rendered magnificent poetry performances. The participants pledged their solidarity and support for the DAC Book Club.

The focus of the book club is local writing and most of the books discussed in the past two years capture the essence of the South African society in its diversity. The books grapple with a range of diverse and often contentious issues of race, sexuality and gender dynamics, among others. Most remarkably, the subject of gender equity was discussed with Zukiswa Wanner, author of the widely acclaimed debut novel, The Madams. The novel is celebrated largely for the author’s sensitivity and acumen in reversing racial stereotypes. This kind of exploration is also evident in Nape oa Motana’s Fanie Fourie’s Lobola, where Fanie Fourie, a white Afrikaner man, falls in love with a Motswana girl, Dimakatso. The Afrikaner boytjie is subjected to Tswana culture and has to pay the customary lobola before marrying Dimakatso. Motana, a social worker by qualification and an accomplished lobola negotiator, confessed that the book was partly inspired by his experience of negotiating lobola over the years.

With contemporary literature being the focus of the book club, many of the
Promoting the culture of reading

TWO YEARS AT A GLANCE

books discussed interrogate the modern society and grapple with issues that are central in our lives today. One such book is Niq Mhlongo’s After Tears, a novel that bears some traces of the author’s lived experience and steeped in the concrete realities of the contemporary society. The novel is about Bafana Khuzwayo, a University of Cape Town student who fails all his courses except Criminal Law. The story is set in Soweto and Mhlongo has been hailed as a writer of the “Kwaito Generation” because of his ability to portray vivid images of township life in his novels.

Moele, author of the award winning novel, Room 207. This debut novel by the Limpopo-born Moele can be best described in the words of Doctorow, “There’s no longer any such thing as fiction and non-fiction, there’s only narrative.” This description rings true of Moele’s Room 207, which is a gripping narrative of six young men who share the same room in a dilapidated building in Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

To take the motif of the life in the Johannesburg suburbia even further, the DAC Book Club hosted Kgebetli Moele, author of the award winning novel, Room 207. This debut novel by the Limpopo-born Moele can be best described in the words of Doctorow, “There’s no longer any such thing as fiction and non-fiction, there’s only narrative.” This description rings true of Moele’s Room 207, which is a gripping narrative of six young men who share the same room in a dilapidated building in Hillbrow, Johannesburg.

There is a significant paradigm shift from the urban space, which for a while seemed to be the preoccupation of the emerging writers, to rural and peri-urban settings. Jo-Anne Richard’s My Brother’s Book is set in the small town of Adelaide in Eastern Cape Province. This novel depicts the lives of people in the country-

Jo-Anne Richards (right) receiving a present from Ayanda August

Niq Mhlongo discussing After Tears at the DAC Book Club
side as it explores the movement of a broken family in the Eastern Cape of 1960s. The present day Eastern Cape is captured in two novels that take manhood as their subject matter. *When a Man Cries* by Siphiwo Mahala and *A Man Who is Not a Man* by Thando Mgqolozana both interrogate various notions of manhood in the modern society. Mgqolozana’s novel grapples with the topical issue of circumcision and delves into the far reaches of the ritual, its social implications as well as its association with the construction of manhood notions.

The discussion between Winston Mohapi and Dumisani Sibiya focused on the development of indigenous language writing. Mohapi, a staffer at DAC, is the author of several Sesotho novels and Sibiya, on the other hand, is a young award winning isiZulu writer and publisher. Both authors noted with concern the marginalization of indigenous languages in the book sector. In the same breath, they commended the efforts of the book club and the DAC in preserving and promoting the use of indigenous languages.

A scene from the discussion of Thando Mgqolozana’s *A Man Who is Not a Man*, which attracted well over forty participants.
Promoting the culture of reading

TWO YEARS AT A GLANCE

One of the most vibrant discussions hosted by the Book Club was with Ndumiso Ngcobo, author of Some of My Best Friends Are White. Ngcobo is an author with a mind of his own—never reluctant to comment on unconventional, sensitive and sometimes controversial issues of gender, ethnicity and race dynamics. “Men are kings at deluding themselves that they are in charge but women are masters at the art of leading from the back,” he says.

In the past two years the book club celebrated National Women’s Month by discussing works that address and take as their theme issues central to women. This started in August 2008, by hosting three distinguished poets, Khanyi Magubane, Bandile Gumbi and Neo Molefe who are all contributors to Basadzi Voices, a collection of poetry by women. In 2009 Women’s Month was celebrated with Angelina N. Sithebe as the guest author. Sithebe is the author of the novel, Holy Hill, which received honorary mention at the prestigious M-Net Literary Awards in 2007 and has been critically reviewed all over the world.
South African poets have established themselves with laudable excellence both on stage and in the page. One of the fringe benefits in hosting poets is that there is always a possibility of getting a free performance. Indeed, the DAC Book Club was not deprived when Masoja Msiza, author of *Voice of Hope* and a distinguished performer, graced the book club. He performed some of his most popular poems in both isiZulu and English. The multitalented Lebo Mashile, well known as a spoken word poet, TV presenter and actress, performed poems from both her books, *In a Ribbon of Rhythm* and *Flying Above the Sky*. She left the audience gasping for more when she finished off her performance with her invigorating poem, “What Kind of a Woman”. Lisa Combrinck, also a staffer in the DAC, mesmerized her colleagues with provocative verses from her collection, *An Infinite Longing for Love*. The discussion was enlightening and important in the affirmation of womanhood.
The programme for 2009 saw the introduction of the public lecture aspect as an effort to encourage public participation. The first such occasion was held on 1 April 2009 at the National Library, Pretoria. Dubbed *Poetry, Memory and National Consciousness*, this public debate addressed issues affecting youth in a democratic state and drew parallels between literature and national consciousness. Panelists included the legendary multi-award winning poet, Dr Don Mattera, distinguished publisher and former journalist, Mothobi Mutloatse and the Noma award winning poetess, Lebo Mashile.

This occasion was followed by an equally thrilling public lecture delivered by Vikas Swarup, author of the multi-award winning novel, *Q&A*, also known as *Slumdog Millionaire*. The book was adapted into a film that later raked eight Academies. Given the success of both
his book and the movie world wide, Swarup is best suited to speak about the cross-pollination of genres, hence his lecture was simply entitled “Adaptation from Script to Screen.”

The commitment and selfless dedication that was demonstrated by South African authors during the launch of the book club became evident as the programme unfolded. In the first two years of its existence the DAC Book Club hosted twenty-four local authors and one author from India (Vikas Swarup). There are more writers who have not been hosted yet and this testifies to the diversity and wealth of South African literature.

The past few years have seen the emergence of a galaxy of stars in our literary landscape and the challenge is for the reading community to embrace them and provide the necessary support. These writers are our cultural ambassadors as they continue to occupy their rightful places among the best in the world. Their stories trigger our conscience as we try to find our way through the dynamic social, economic and human labyrinths of the global society. The DAC Book Club is committed to giving writers the support they deserve through continued reading and regular discussion of books.
A n award ceremony was held to recognise members who have made outstanding contribution to the DAC Book Club. Five members received Merit Awards recognition for the sterling work they have put to ensure that the book club is a resounding success.

The contribution made by the five candidates demonstrates their continued commitment to the objectives of the Book Club throughout the year. The recognition of the members who have made exceptional contribution to the Book Club is a small gesture to encourage all officials to promote the culture of reading in all sectors of society. Congratulations to all the award recipients!

(From left to right) Siyanda Toni, Memory Mkuyana, Siphiwo Mahala, Sibongile Nxumalo and Kego Mbiza.
Selection Criteria

The Book Club sessions are held during lunch time and these officials have made sacrifices in order to promote the culture of reading in the work place. The selection criteria include:

- Regular attendance of Book Club activities
- Exceptional commitment to reading (both chosen and not chosen texts)
- Significant participation during Book Club discussions
- Playing special roles such as facilitating discussions, writing reports and logistical arrangements for Book Club activities
- Recognisable growth of the reading culture
- Commitment to all book club activities
- Encouraging other colleagues to read or join the Book Club
2008 ACHIEVERS

Siyanda Toni receiving an award from Mr. Winston Mohapi. Toni demonstrated good character in his selfless dedication to the book club. He is with the National Language Service component of the Department and when the book club was formed he was based in Metro Park and had to walk long distances to attend sessions at Kingsley Centre, the main office of the Department.

Memory Mkuyana receiving an award from Prof. Keorapetse Kgotsitsile. Mkuyana was instrumental in the establishment of the book club and continued to serve it diligently. She has since left the Department.
2008 ACHIEVERS

Kego Mbiza (left) was with the IT component of the Department and was instrumental in spreading the word about the book club and its activities. She demonstrated dramatic improvement in her reading habits since the book club was established. She has since left the Department but continues to support and attend book club activities.

Pertunia Ntladi (right) receiving an award from Boitumelo Seomana. Ntladi is one of the most inspirational forces behind the establishment of the book club. She is an ardent reader and as an official operating the Front Desk she was instrumental in promoting the culture of reading in the Department. She also dabbed as a librarian for the book club.
Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to encourage and assist the various sectors of our society, including government departments, libraries and other relevant structures, to establish book clubs and to extend the book club phenomenon to their communities (i.e. places of residence). Book Clubs are established with the purpose of creating interactive platforms where members share their reading experiences and encourage one another to read for pleasure.

The following paragraphs present Five Basic Steps as guidelines for the establishment and running of book clubs especially in the work place. In presenting this model we combine our experience at DAC Book Club with information that we gathered through research, observation and advice. The guideline is in two parts, viz. the recommended model which is idealistic in its conceptualization and the reflective model, based on our experience. Each situation is unique and the model that we present here is not cast in stone, but we hope that readers will take elements that they find useful for their specific purposes. The Five Basic Steps are as follows:

1. Find Book Club Members

Book clubs provide an opportunity for readers to share information and the pleasure of reading. The main purpose of establishing book clubs is to encourage people to read and share information.

One of the most critical steps in establishing a book club is identifying people who are already passionate readers. You must try and get more information about their reading interests, including the frequency of their reading and the type of books they read. Readers are usually receptive when someone shows interest in what they read and are often keen to share their reading experiences. If you have about six people who read regularly you have the basis for forming a book club. These individuals will form the Core Group of your book club.

Once you are able to get your core group together, the next step would be for them to encourage their relatives, friends or colleagues to start reading for pleasure. One way to do this is to make books a familiar and attractive object in your institution. What usually happens is that if a visitor finds a book lying around they will pick it up and start browsing. This is the best way to get people hooked and we encourage that
GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A BOOK CLUB

books are put in visible places where they are noticeable (and not just in the library, study or bedroom). Allow trusted colleagues, friends and family to borrow the book but give them time-frames to return them.

When they return the book after reading chances are that they will share their impressions of the book. Listen carefully and identify aspects that seem to appeal to them the most. Recommend an author whom you believe they will find interesting. Now you have potential members for your book club and the next step would be to expand the group.

The Case of DAC Book Club: The book club started with the exchange of books among a few officials using their personal collections. The most influential readers were front-desk personnel and this was quite a good display to advertise the reading culture. This made both our staff members and visitors curious to know more about the books. More colleagues started borrowing the books and word began to spread about certain interesting titles and people started buying for themselves. More colleagues brought their books to the Department and books started circulating (and disappearing) among the staff members.

We have membership of over hundred individuals but the average number of participants in each session is twenty-five.

2. Elect a Committee

Committees usually intimidate people and some may be discouraged from participating. It is not advisable to elect a committee from the onset. Once you have a sizeable number of dedicated members, it is only then that you should consider electing a committee. It is important to stress that the committee is a central structure and that all book club members must be willing to assist especially ahead of major events.

A book club committee does not need to be comprised of too many members. A Convener or Chairperson, the Coordinator and the Secretary will be enough to form the Book Club committee. The Chairperson plays a strategic role and presides over all book club matters. The Coordinator is responsible for the daily running of the Book Club and must takeover when the chairperson is not available. The secretary performs all clerical and administrative duties and keeps record of all the activities including the borrowed books. These three portfolios are essential to run the book club and others may be established
as the need arises. We must stress that people who serve in the book club committee are individuals with genuine interest in reading and must be reliable.

One of the first duties of the committee will be to set up what we call “Ground Rules” as opposed to a constitution. To paraphrase Es’kia Mphahlele, a constitution has a tendency to weigh down on the book club and frustrate progress owing to the countless, often sterile debates over clauses members call in to question. These ground rules must enhance the running of the book club and basic issues like loan periods. It is the duty of the secretary to keep record of loans and follow up with members when a book is overdue. The committee in consultation with the book club membership will decide on the “Book of the Month”, who should be the facilitator and when to have book discussions. It is usually exciting when Book Club members are involved in selecting the books and this ensures their active participation in the discussion.

**The Case of DAC Book Club:** The DAC Book Club elected a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Organiser and Secretary. At a later stage one of the outstanding members of the book club who was not initially elected into the committee was co-opted as the additional member. The additional member is essentially someone who is highly motivated and can assist on a variety of things, including facilitating, designing posters, and liaising with guest authors. The number of committee members is also determined by the size of the book club membership as well as the number and nature of activities involved. Members are given up to fourteen working days for book loans and a maximum of five working days when the book is borrowed in the same month of its discussion. The book club buys maximum two copies per title and encourages individual members to buy their own books.

### 3. Choose Books

As indicated earlier, the choice of books is determined first, by the interest of the core group. In other words, you identify the commonality in the books that are read by the founding group. Examples could be whether the founding members are interested in biographies, fiction, non-fiction or poetry. The first books that you stock would be a combination of classics and the latest publications in the genre. From there you can add a variety of books, including new genres that some members were not exposed to before.
GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A BOOK CLUB

Book retail shops, newspaper reviews, Radio and TV shows are useful resources to identify latest publications. Recent publications usually appeal more to new readers as they are in the public eye due to advertisements and reviews in the media. It is however important to note that a popular text does not always translate to a good book. This is the reason why it is advisable to combine new publications with classics in your reading list. We encourage Book Clubs to select primarily South African books in this process. South Africa has an abundance of literary talent and there is a plethora of writers to choose from.

The choice of books for discussion can be determined by a number of factors, including the annual calendar. For example, in June you can celebrate Youth Month by discussing a book by young authors such as K. Sello Duiker, Kopano Matlwa or John Van De Ruit and in August you can celebrate Women’s Month by reading works by some prominent women writers such as Miriam Tlali, Zoë Wicomb or Nadine Gordimer. Following are some of the recommended titles in the various genres:

**Fiction**
- Ways of Dying
  by Zakes Mda
- Triomf
  by Merlene van Niekerk
- And they Didn’t Die
  by Lauretta Ngcobo
- The Good Doctor
  by Damon Galgut

**Poetry**
- This Way I Salute You
  by Keorapetse Kgotsisile
- Azanian Love Songs
  by Don Mattera
- In a Ribbon of Rhythm
  by Lebogang Mashile
- A Hundred Silences
  by Gabeba Baderoon

**Biography**
- Down Second Avenue
  by Hezekiel Mphahlele
- Walter and Albertina Sisulu: A Biography
  by Elinor Sisulu
- A Dream Differed
  by Mark Givisser
- Long Walk to Freedom
  by Nelson R. Mandela
GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A BOOK CLUB

Short Stories

- **Fools and Other Stories**  
  by Njabulo S. Ndebele
- **Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night**  
  by Sindiwe Magona
- **Hungry Flames**  
  by Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane (Ed.)
- **To Kill a Man’s Pride**  
  by Norman Hodge (Ed.)

The Case of DAC Book Club: It is interesting to note that while the DAC has hosted over twenty authors in the past two years, only two of the above mentioned authors have been hosted in the book club. This testifies to the richness of our literature and, for as long as there is rapid growth in readership, these writers will continue producing more books for the nation. To aid us in the process of choosing books, members were asked to recommend and the most prominent titles were prioritized in purchasing the first stock for our library. We try to update the stock every six months.

4. Generate a Calendar

It is important that you decide on a reasonable time for everyone to meet. In a work environment, it is advisable that you do not meet more than once a week for book discussions. The calendar must be developed for at least the following six months and circulated to all members of the book club. Certain adjustments will be made when necessary during the course of the year.

You must allow time for members to read and finish the books so that they are fully prepared to engage in discussions. You must agree on the best time to meet. It is important that you choose time that will be convenient for the most members of the book club without compromising their core duties at work. It is preferable that you remain consistent in your meeting days and time.

The frequency of meetings is also very important. You must not overwhelm members with regular meetings. Book club discussions must remain exciting and all members should look forward to these interactions and this will not be achieved if your meetings are too frequent. We recommend that in the work place you do not meet more than twice a month. A few members can always meet and discuss specific issues especially in preparation for a session.

The Case of DAC Book Club: We agreed to meet on Wednesdays at
12h30 fortnightly. In the first meeting colleagues discuss any book that each one of them is reading and after a fortnight we discuss a common read or book of the month. We are fortunate that we have discussed our common reads with the authors. This however is not a precondition for a book club discussion to take place. The presence of the author is a unique opportunity to interact with the creator of the story and we are grateful to all the authors who have graced our discussion sessions so far.

5. Host Discussions

The most exciting moment in any book club is hosting discussions and this comes with a lot of anxiety. To minimise such feelings, it is important that you delegate duties to the various members in preparation for the session and ensure that everyone reads the book.

The key ingredient to hosting a successful book club discussion is reading and this is one of the reasons why you have to agree on the calendar in advance. You must also agree on the lead discussant or facilitator of the discussion. The facilitation of book club discussions is not the responsibility of certain members. The duty of the facilitator is to ensure an interactive discussion. In doing so, they must try to create a friendly atmosphere to encourage everyone to participate without feeling intimidated. All members must be aware that they will be required to facilitate discussions at some point. The facilitator can either volunteer or be elected to do so by the book club. It is however important that you rotate facilitators. The facilitator must be someone who has read the book thoroughly. In preparation for the session they must do further research about the subject, including biographical information of the author, other publications by the same author and reviews of the book being discussed. The facilitator must be informed at least three weeks before the discussion so that they can make extra effort to prepare for the discussion. It is advisable that the facilitator writes down about ten questions or so in preparation for the discussion. Erin Collazo Miller, who has written extensively about leading book club discussions, recommends that the facilitator writes down important page numbers. For more information about preparing for facilitating a book club discussion please visit: http://bestseller.about.com/od/bookclubresources/

Even though there may be a facilitator, it is important to have a backup facilitator for in case there is an emergency.
and the appointed facilitator is unable attend the session. The rest of the members, especially the chairperson, must be equally prepared to facilitate the discussion at any given moment. A small group may have what is normally referred to as a “dry-run”, where they discuss the book and approaches to facilitating the book club discussion session.

The Case of DAC Book Club: We have been very fortunate to have authors among us when we discuss their books and this encouraged us to prepare thoroughly for the discussions. This has also increased the level of enthusiasm as a result most of the time members volunteer to facilitate discussions. We usually allow the author to read a passage of their choice as a way of starting the session. The facilitator follows with two or three questions before giving the rest of the participants opportunity to comment or ask questions.

Conclusion

We are aware that there are important aspects that could not be addressed comprehensively in this publication. Our objective is to present a basic framework to give guidelines for establishing book clubs. As indicated in the introduction to this section, every situation is unique and we do not intend to impose our model to other book clubs. We have shared our ambitions and in a more pragmatic manner reflected on our experience in establishing and running the DAC Book Club. We trust that this booklet will be a useful resource to inspire more people and assist in the establishment of book clubs. In addition to information entailed in this booklet, some officials will be available to engage in a more interactive manner with the various members of our society.
MESSAGES OF SUPPORT

Through an introduction by fellow author and friend, Siphiwo Mahala I was invited by the DAC Book Club as their Women’s Month guest on 19 August 2009. What a pleasure! Everything was thoughtfully prepared from the poster by Sibongile Nxumalo and the gift, lunch and co-ordination by Ayanda August. In their packed boardroom, Members engaged me in passionate, intellectual though good-humoured debate. Sandile Memela couldn’t resist pushing my limits.

At the end, my wrist was limp from signing books. I left with a warm inspiring feeling for my writing to be acknowledged in such an honorable way.

Phambili Book Clubs!
Angelina N. Sithebe, author of Holy Hill

The Department of Arts and Culture must be applauded and welcomed for officially conceiving and launching the much needed but long-overdue Book Club project. Not only will it be a double boon that will encourage and stimulate a culture of reading among the general public per se; and also promote education and social interaction among the young generation. This may positively impact on South African communities over the long term. Reading is a vital cornerstone in education and in the development of leadership among all spheres of human progress.

I fully commit my time and services to this vital and sterling endeavour. I am honoured and deeply gratified, and herewith pledge my humble support, endorsement and patronage of the book club project.

Don Mattera, distinguished poet and recipient of the Presidential Order of Ikhamanga
People who read are special. They have a sense of the world beyond their own. They develop a sense of history and of themselves within a larger context. Reading should be a joy if it is to become a lifelong habit. It doesn’t matter what is being read. If it’s enjoyable, it will grow the reader. It will show them other worlds; other people. The DAC book club encourages reading for fun - which is the only way we will develop a reading culture. A society that reads will never be an ignorant one. And a society that reads will have imagination and empathy for others. After all, how else can we learn to put ourselves in other people’s shoes, to feel how they feel, and understand why they act as they do?

Jo-Anne Richards, author of My Brother’s Book

Literature enhances cultural exchange, understanding and friendship among peoples. In the 21st century literature is produced more in book form than through the oral art of eloquence. Books have, logically, become the indispensable key for unlocking and opening the doors of learning and of culture. To make a significant contribution to a culture of reading and writing is one of the major tasks of the Department of Arts and Culture. The establishment of the DAC Book Club was, and remains, a major step in that direction. Let book clubs flower all over the country to enrich our lives.

Keorapetse Kgotsi, National Poet laureate
MESSAGES OF SUPPORT

Kgebetli Moele, author of Room 207 and The Book of the Dead

I knew how to write a book because I knew how to read and enjoy them. I have never been to Nigeria but I have been a Nigerian citizen dozens of times. I was there when the white man first set foot on African soil. When Things Fall Apart, and shed a tear when the last brave African man’s body fought for breathe.

I have played with Huckleberry Finn on the Mississippi river and Maru is the only romance I know and they said that it is protest writing. I say it is a love story. You don’t know how many times I have come within the lines of that woman but Pretoria evicted me from Buckingham Palace, District Six and I know that ‘all animals are equal but some are more equal than others.’ Because like a certain donkey named Benjamin, I can READ.

One of the most important aspects insofar as developing writers is for the culture of reading to be entrenched in our country. Young writers need to become more curious about how the world is put together rather than allow others to interpret it for them. There must be a broader discussion about books and writing.

Mandla Langa, author of The Lost Colours of the Chameleon

Book Club Information Booklet
When we read we enter the minds of the characters. We get dressed in their clothes and open their fridges and eat whatever we want. Through living their lives, when we come back to our own set of circumstances, we see new opportunities. Reading gives us a bank of wisdom and an eight-cylinder imagination that crosses the world, past, present and future. There is no charge and no petrol needed for us to become truly rich, because nobody can steal the wealth of the mind. Reading is the original something for Mahala.

**Phillippa yaa de Villiers, Poet and author of Taller than Buildings**

The beauty of a book, beyond the story being told, is that you get to travel. It allows you to go where you may otherwise never go, experience elements of life that are far removed from your everyday reality. Whether it’s fiction or not, reading opens you up to a variety of life experiences, takes you through a myriad of relationships and introduces you to a cast of characters fit for any stage. There is a lot to be said for the power of the imagination and how this can just expand your mind. Dan Brown’s The Da Vinci Code took me on a guided tour of some of Europe’s most historical site while Peter Harris’ In a Different Time taught me what it takes to be so committed to a cause that you are willing to die for it.

**Masechaba Mosheshoe, Literary enthusiast, Actress and Radio Personality**
Talking about reading. If the body needs exercise in order to stay healthy, the same is true of the mind, and what better way to do this than reading, for the mind gains from reading what the body gains from exercise. To fully appreciate the fitness gained through exercise, one could participate in team sport, so could a reader in a Book Club. The DAC initiative to promote the culture of reading through establishing, and inspiring the establishment of Book Clubs, is like starting a National Sport League, for the sole purpose of exercising the mind. I want to be part of this, so should everybody.

Thando Mgqolozana, author of A Man Who is Not a Man

One of my most wonderful experiences as a lover of books was when I was invited by a group of women in Phuthaditjhaba, Qwaqwa in the Free State who had established a book club. What was most fascinating about this initiative was that it grew from the grassroots and was not imposed on the women from above. And these were ordinary housewives and perhaps one or two primary school teachers, a nurse and a young woman who worked as a clerk at a local general dealer’s store.

Their objective was to read books of all kinds for pleasure in both Sesotho and English. Their emphasis was on fiction because it is the most pleasurable to read. They had already read such modern classics as /Mahaheng a Matsho/ by J.J. Machobane, /Raphepheng/ by E. Seogoete and /Beloved/ by Toni Morrison (For some reasons book clubs in South Africa are much enamored of /Beloved./ Quite a number of them have had this novel on their reading
One thing that the women discovered was that although their primary objective was to read for the pleasure of reading they derived greater benefits than they had ever imagined.

The fortnightly gatherings enhanced the community spirit of sharing. They were enriched about the world and about their own culture. They even discovered and read a local writer of the early fifties they had previously never heard of, A.S. Mopeli-Paulus who co-authored with Peter Lanham a novel in English titled /Blanket Boy’s Moon/. Here they were reading a story set in their own community about one of their own. The book club was expanding their horizons and from the readings and the discussions that followed they were gaining more information about their own culture and about the world. As we all should know, the universal springs from the particular.

The women were now able to get to grips with their own world, to interpret it for themselves thus gaining a high level of critical awareness, and therefore become informed participants in our democracy. It is from this experience that I commend and endorse the efforts of the DAC Book Club. Such an endeavor cannot but stimulate the participants’ interest in life and imbue them with a greater appreciation of South Africa, Africa and the rest of humanity.

**Zakes Mda**, author of numerous novels including Black Diamond, Cion, Whale Caller, etc.

Ask any leader in the different industry and the one thing all of them will have in common is that they read. It is clear therefore that readers are leaders because they always know what is happening in the different social, political and economical spheres. The question that every South African must ask themselves therefore is, when did they last read or encourage their child to read? And if you cannot remember then ask yourself another question...what is the future of this country if the other 48 million people are like you?

**Zukiswa Wanner**, author of The Madams and Behind Every Successful Man

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Zukiswa Wanner  
Photo by: Lisa Skinner
**A MAN WHO IS NOT A MAN**  
Thando Mgqolozana

This powerful first novel recounts the personal trauma of a young Xhosa initiate after botched circumcision. With frankness and courage, author Thando Mgqolozana details the pain and lifelong shame that is experienced as a result of not just the physical trauma, but the social ostracism of being labelled ‘a failed man’. He decodes the values and mysteries of this deep-seated cultural tradition and calls to account the elders for the disintegrating support systems that allow such tragic outcomes to happen.

**AFTER TEARS**  
Niq Mhlongo

Bafana is a young man with a weight on his shoulders. After flunking his law studies at UCT, he now has to find a way to either admit the truth to his family, or somehow find a job that will allow him to continue fooling them. What should Bafana do? Should he bite the bullet and confess the truth to his mother and uncle, or should he rather take up Yomi's suggestion to buy a law degree and start practicing as an attorney?
In this spirited and defiantly individualistic collection, 13 young black women poets—representative of a group that has long been among the most creatively silent of South African voices—speak up and speak out with boldness, passion and honesty. This collection will give you a glimpse into our through, our experiences, ourlives. We hope that it will be a source of inspiration to other young South Africans, encouraging them to dream big and live out their dreams. In the words of Hale Tsehlana, we “write” because it is time” - OUR time!"

Plunging the reader into a phantasmagoric world where streets are paved with human remains and men are apocalyptically condemned to death by the fire of their loins, these short stories strike a fabulist and magical realism drawn from African traditions and present-day conditions. For all its contemporary relevance, this collection has at its core a dialogue between the living and their ancestors that creates a powerful resonance between the bones of the dead and the echoes of their survivors.
**Bitchies’ Brew**  
Fred Khumalo

Focusing on the epic love affair between a former amateur musician—who happens to be a bootlegger, mercenary, and killer—and a shebeen queen, this South African love story traces the couple’s lives and loves through the interweaving of history and memory in the tradition of village storytellers. Interweaving history and memories in the tradition of village storytellers, Bitches’ Brew delves into the physical and emotional turbulence that characterizes the lives and affairs of Bra Zakes and Lettie as they unearth a story that reveals character, conflict, principle and, of course, love.

**Fanie Fourie’s Lobola**  
Nape oa Motana

Fanie Fourie is a true blue ‘boere seun’ with an unrepentantly macho approach to love and life in general. But his worldview undergoes an abrupt reinvention when he is ‘bitten by the louse and bedbug of love’ and falls head-over-heels for Dimakatjo Machabaphala, a beautiful black nurse. With a deft and humourous pen the author evokes the colliding worlds of traditional and contemporary culture in a South Africa still struggling to renegotiate roles and relationships and shake off the complexes and prejudices of the past.
HOLY HILL
Angelina N. Sithebe

Two lives are twinned in this unusual and disturbing novel: that of Nana, desperately seeking release from existence, and of Claude, an illegal immigrant from central Africa to whom she is powerfully attracted and whose struggle for salvation she undermines and destroys. Connected with the spirit world from earliest childhood, Nana can see what others cannot. Worried about teaching her right from wrong, her parents send her to Holy Hill Convent, a Roman Catholic boarding school in Zululand, where the Sisters take on the challenge of raising her, going to extremes of discipline. After she leaves the Convent, Nana rebels, drifting between relationships, jobs and homes until she meets Claude.

IN A RIBBON OF RHYTHM
Lebogang Mashile

This Noma Award winning book is the first published collection of poetry by Lebogang Mashile, known largely as a performance poet. Listening to Lebogang Mashile speak her words is like having a thrilling silk ribbon drawn through the ripples of your brain. Her rhythms are put to paper for the first time in this collection of her exhilarating poems.
BOOKS DISCUSSED

KUNGASA NGIFILE
Dumisani Sibiya

The novel raises issues concerned with moral consciousness with regard to post-apartheid black African youth. It apparently joins the voices that call for moral regeneration. Magwaza (2004:41) observes “there is a national outcry in South Africa regarding ... prevailing low morals” because “South Africa is going through a process which could be described as a form of moral degradation”. The novel raises the readers’ awareness of the moral degradation affecting the youth and it affirms the possibility of positive change among the youth whose values and morals have been eroded and corrupted in the fight against apartheid.

AN INFINITE LONGING FOR LOVE
Lisa Combrinck

This collection of poetry explores the theme of love in its various facets – love for a country, love for freedom, love for a man, love for a child and love for love itself. The entire collection is devoted to love songs and the often contrary emotions that love engenders. The poetry is filled with startling images and provocative phrases. The poetry is woman-centric and celebrates the feminine from a humanist and womanist perspective. The American academic, Mary de Shazer, describes the poet as breaking new ground when she writes that: “In her frank expressions of desire as resistance and resistance as desire, Combrinck represents a new breed of South African women poets”.
BOOKS DISCUSSED

LEHLABA LA LEPHAKO
T.W.D. Mohapi

My Brother’s Book tells a story of betrayal and atonement that spans the lives of two siblings from their nomadic childhood in the Eastern Cape in the 1960s, to their adulthood in 2004 in Johannesburg. While the nation struggles to come to terms with its past, Lily struggles with her guilt about her careless betrayal of her brother, Tom, which destroyed his life and their relationship. Tom confronts this fraught past by writing a memoir. But both Lily and Tom’s former lover Miranda, take issue with the way he book remembers their shared pasts.

LEHLABA LA LEPHAKO
T.W.D. Mohapi

Phetoh o ntjha ya dipolotiki Afrikaborwa e bakile hore ho be le melao e mtjha ya mesebetsi. Ke ka lebaka lena basebetsi ba rapolasi Swanepoel ba neng ba sa thabela ka moo ba neng ba tshwerwe ka teng ke foromane, oubuti Seabata, eo a neng a ba hlekelsetsa e le ha a kgotsofatsa monnga polasi. Seabata o qetelletse e le moiketsi ya sa ilelweng.

The new political dispensation in South Africa brought new labour laws. It is in this context that the labourers at Swanepoel’s farm were not content with their treatment by the foreman, Seabata, who ill-treated them to please the farmer. Seabata ended up being the victim of his own doing.
**BOOKS DISCUSSED**

**RED INK**
Angela Makholwa

Lucy Khambule, a young attractive journalist, receives a call from Napoleon Dingiswayo. He is a convicted serial killer, locked up in C-Max in Pretoria. He wants to talk about his life. Lucy believes that meeting him will help her to fulfil a childhood dream of writing a book. Napoleon is a willing subject. Soon Lucy realises that she has bitten off a bit more than she can chew. She retreats and turns to the world of PR. But her world is turned upside down by a number of terrifying events.

**ROOM 207**
Kgebetli Moele

Kgebetli Moele’s raw, beautiful prose exposes a world in which humour and despair exist in equal measures, a world where the need to succeed, to strike it rich, brings out the best and the worst of human nature. Room 207 takes the reader to a Jo’burg that is the very heart of South Africa, to a room in which young men struggle to make their dreams come true in the ‘dream city’.
**SHAMELESS**  
Futhi Ntshingila

Thandiwe lives by her own rules. She shamelessly sells her body on the streets of Yeoville and views her job as no different from those of young black graduates who take up affirmative action posts as perpetual juniors under soul-destroying mentors. Thandiwe’s searing views on the post-apartheid corporate world become public when she is approached by Kwena, a young film-maker who is interested in telling the stories of prostitutes and the shameful secrets of many. It’s a long way from the poor, rural village where Thandiwe and her best friend Zonke grew up, facing the many challenges of a vulnerable childhood together.

**SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE (Q&A)**  
Vikas Swarup

A former tiffinboy from Mumbai, Ram Mohammad Thomas, has just got twelve questions correct on a TV quiz show to win a cool one billion rupees. But he is brutally slung in a prison cell on suspicion of cheating. Because how can a kind from the slums know who Shakespeare was unless he has been pulling a fast one? In the order of questions on the show, Ram tells us which amazing adventures in his street-kid life taught him the answers. From the orphanages to brothels, gangsters to beggar-masters, and into the homes of Bollywood’s rich and famous, Slumdog Millionaire is brimming with the chaotic comedy, heart-stopping tragedy, and tear-inducing joyfulness of modern India.
BOOKS DISCUSSED

SOME OF MY BEST FRIENDS ARE WHITE
Ndumiso Ngcobo

Some of My Best Friends are White is a collection of sharp, satirical essays on contemporary South African issues from the point of view of a successful corporate professional – who just happens to be Zulu. Crossing various controversial, amusing and downright confusing racial divides, the title delivers a healthy dose of black – and white – humour as it explores some of the rainbow nation’s defining characteristics, its many colourful characters and its myriad mysterious idiosyncrasies.

THE MADAMS
Zukiswa Wanner

The novel explores among other themes, racism in a class society set in post-apartheid South Africa; sex and sexuality within and outside the confines of marriage and socially acceptable norms; as well as the inexplicable strength and beauty of friendship and sisterhood. The Madams intentionally or otherwise, exposes the fact that 21st Century liberalism and equality between man and woman in Africa is almost unattainable in reality."
BOOKS DISCUSSED

**VOICE OF HOPE**
Masoja Msiza

He comments: “I am inspired by events and circumstances that our society and communities experience…The themes I write about are socially related issues like domestic violence, substance abuse, illiteracy, motivation and rehabilitation. Poetry for me is the mother of all art forms, be it storytelling, music, drama, etc. I figure that poetry is not given the right support it deserves instead much attention is given to the other forms of art, we need to have more platforms that bring poets together with musicians and performers on the same stage.”

**WHEN A MAN CRIES**
Siphiwo Mahala

When a Man Cries is an uncompromising and engrossing novel about the challenges of manhood in contemporary South African society. It interrogates the dynamics of township life and the human and socio-economic realities of the most impoverished communities in post-apartheid South Africa.