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Why MASTERPIECE?

For more than 40 years, MASTERPIECE—the longest-running, prime time drama series on American television—has produced programs of extraordinary quality and depth, many of which are based upon classic works of literature. It’s also the most celebrated television series, with 57 Emmy® Awards, 18 Peabody Awards, and 2 Academy Award nominations.

A MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club gathers people together to discuss great books and the way filmmakers have interpreted them. Whether you are a librarian, an educator, or simply someone who loves books and movies, you can host a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club! You may already belong to a book and/or film club, or are looking for a new angle, or want to start a new club. Choosing MASTERPIECE as the basis for your club will infuse new energy and excitement, or may inspire people to come to the library or join a discussion group for the first time.

The MASTERPIECE website offers a wealth of resources for you to use in creating and managing your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club, including:

- The Book & Film Club section, containing 25 different discussion guides, with engaging questions, activities, and links
- The Teachers section, with 21 educational guides, providing extensive background information, genre study, discussion questions, activities, and more
- Streaming video for a limited time after each MASTERPIECE broadcast
- Interviews with actors, directors, screenwriters, and others
- Behind-the-scenes videos, interactive games, and special features

MASTERPIECE also has a vital and active presence on Facebook and Twitter. For certain titles, MASTERPIECE has hosted Twitter discussions with scholars and other experts.

This handbook offers tools and resources to help you establish, promote, and lead a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club, as well as innovative ideas for choosing titles and themes, and useful resources.
MASTERPIECE Mash-up

Since its rebranding in 2008 as Masterpiece (formerly Masterpiece Theatre), the series has continued to attract the devotion—and praise—of critics and fans alike. The broad range of Masterpiece programs offers many opportunities to mix and match titles, themes, and topics. The possibilities are endless! Here are some ideas to get you started. (You’ll find each specific book & film club guide mentioned below at pbs.org/masterpiecebookclub.)

Super Sleuths
You may want to focus on the “cozy” Miss Marple mysteries, the upper-crust detective Inspector Lynley, the world-weary Swedish detective Kurt Wallander, the young Cordelia Grey in An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (based on books by P. D. James), tough private investigator Jackson Brodie (in Case Histories, based on stories by Kate Atkinson), or the granddaddy of them all, Woman in White (based on the book by Wilkie Collins). You could also select one of each and compare and contrast them. (See the Agatha Christie Book & Film Club Guide, Inspector Lynley Book & Film Club Guide, and Wallander Book & Film Club Guide.)

Sherlock: Past and Present
Compare the brilliant reimagining of Sherlock (see Sherlock Book & Film Club Guide) for a 21st-century audience (smartphone and all) with the more traditional Arthur Conan Doyle tale The Hound of the Baskervilles (see The Hound of the Baskervilles Book & Film Club Guide). The pairing allows for a thought-provoking exploration of issues, including modernizing classics, novel-to-film adaptation, and literary legacy.

English Society
Compare and contrast the elegant Regency world of Jane Austen (see the Jane Austen Book & Film Club Guide), whose sharp observations and heartfelt romances take place in a genteel, early-19th-century England, with Dickens’s exciting, bustling, grimy Victorian London, transformed by the late-19th-century Industrial Revolution (see the Dickens Book & Film Club Guide, as well as the Bleak House Book & Film Guide). For another look at mid-19th-century rural English society, read and watch Thomas Hardy’s Under the Greenwood Tree (see the Under the Greenwood Tree Book & Film Guide).
Cook the Books!
Many book & film clubs pair refreshments with the theme or setting of the book they are reading or watching. Here are some ways you can enhance your MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club. (As always, be aware of food allergies and sensitivities. Clearly mark food and drink ingredients.)

- **Dickens Delight:** Choose one or several Dickens titles. Invite members to bring food mentioned in the books and/or films. You can also download and distribute “Recipes from the Brass Sisters,” part of the Charles Dickens Book & Film Club Guide, which features four recipes that Dickens’s characters would have enjoyed: Meat Pie, Shepherd’s Pie, Currant Cream Scones, and Irish Sponge Cake. Ask for volunteers to make one or more of the dishes. (Note: A recipe for Hot Rum Punch, as mentioned in the book David Copperfield, is also provided. Note that the ingredients include—you guessed it—rum.)

- **Tea with Jane Austen:** The Jane Austen Book & Film Club Guide features six recipes (one from each Austen book) culled directly from the novels. Club members can try their hand at one of these recipes (note that the recipe for “Negus” includes ruby port), or put together a homemade or store-bought English “tea” with sandwiches, crumpets, and jams.

- **Try It, You’ll Like It!** There are many different versions of the beet soup called borscht commonly made in several Eastern European countries, including Russia. Hold a “borscht bar” and encourage members to make their favorite version. Sip it hot or cold as you discuss the famous Russian book Doctor Zhivago and its film adaptation. (See the Doctor Zhivago Book & Film Guide.)

- **Smörgåsbord:** Although the characters in the Wallander novels and films seem to exist solely on black coffee, try creating a Swedish smörgåsbord to go along with your exploration of the books by Henning Mankell and the Wallander series (see the Wallander Book & Film Club Guide).

- **Ice Cream Social:** Our Town celebrates small-town life. Another American classic, Pollyanna, is set in a small town in Vermont. Hold an old-fashioned ice cream social to get into the early-20th-century New England mood while watching and discussing these two MASTERPIECE titles. (See the Our Town Book & Film Guide and the Pollyanna Book & Film Guide.)
• **Delicious Death**: The recipe for Delicious Death, a “decadent” chocolate cake, was created to celebrate Agatha Christie’s 120th anniversary, and was inspired by her 50th novel, *A Murder Is Announced*. A local bakery might be willing to undertake the recipe, or you can invite library patrons or group members to contribute their own culinary creation to honor Miss Marple, Hercule Poirot, or Agatha Christie. (See the *Agatha Christie Book & Film Club Guide*.)

**Themes & Motifs**

Matching two or more Masterpiece titles, or comparing a Masterpiece title with a related classic or contemporary book or film, can yield some interesting comparisons. Mix and match these themes and titles.

**Trust & Betrayal**

- Anna Karenina
- Daniel Deronda
- Doctor Zhivago
- Far from the Madding Crowd
- Jane Eyre
- King Lear (starring Ian Holm)
- Rebecca
- The Way We Live Now
- Wuthering Heights

**Coming of Age**

- David Copperfield
- The Diary of Anne Frank
- Framed
- Goodbye, Mr. Chips
- Great Expectations
- Oliver Twist
- Our Town
- Pollyanna

**Romantic Entanglements**

- Anna Karenina
- Any Human Heart
- Austen (any of the 6 novels)
- Jane Eyre
- Wuthering Heights
Creating a MASTERPIECE Book & Film Club

Whether you are starting a new club or are an experienced book & film club member or leader, you will find the following hints and tips helpful.

Planning a Masterpiece Book & Film Club

• **Decide on a format.** Will members watch the film or parts of the film at the meeting (using video, DVD, or online streaming, available for a limited time after broadcast) or at home? Will there be a designated leader (such as the librarian) or rotating leaders? Will someone initiate the discussion with a brief presentation about the title, author, filmmaker, etc.; ask a set number of questions; or will the discussion be more free flowing?

• **Decide how big the group should be.** Most successful discussion groups have approximately 8–12 members. Limiting the number of participants ensures that everyone will have an opportunity to participate each time you meet.

• **Determine when and how often the group will meet.** Decide on when and often you will meet: once a month or every other month? Will you meet during the day or in the evening? Since MASTERPIECE airs on PBS, Sunday evenings at 9 pm, you may want to hold the Book & Film Club meetings on Mondays. However, since each film also streams online for a limited time after broadcast, members may be able to watch at their leisure, and meetings can be held on a day and at a time that is convenient for all. You may also purchase and/or loan DVDs for titles that have aired previously.

• **Decide how long the meetings will last.** Many discussion groups find that meeting for 60–90 minutes affords a comfortable amount of time for discussion and refreshments.

• **Decide on the book/film selection process.** Successful book & film clubs employ a variety of methods for selecting what they read and watch. Sometimes the leader, or the group, chooses according to reviews. Some groups select titles around a theme, genre, author, or book series. To tie into the excitement of the premiere of a MASTERPIECE broadcast or the rebroadcast of a favorite title, check the [MASTERPIECE website](http://www.masterpiece.org) for the upcoming schedule.
• **Make sure multiple copies of the book (and/or film) are available.** In order to allow enough time to read the book or watch the film in a library setting, have copies available at least four weeks before your group meets. A local bookstore may also be able to offer books and/or DVDs at a discount.

• **Make joining the club easy.** If you are a librarian, offer multiple ways for people to sign up. Post sign-up sheets online, at the circulation desk at the library, and at local businesses, schools, community centers, and so on. If you are organizing your own club, you may want to limit membership to word-of-mouth invitations or to an existing group (neighborhood listserv, school group, and so on), or you may want to extend your reach throughout the community.

• **Pick a pleasant location in which to meet.** Be sure there is adequate and comfortable space to gather. Arrange tables and chairs in a circle. Individual book & film clubs often meet at one another’s homes or another easily accessible spot (library, bookstore, community center, coffeehouse, and so on).

• **Establish ground rules.** Be explicit about the group’s expectations regarding punctuality, taking turns, choosing the group leader, bringing refreshments, etc. Agreeing on a common set of expectations promotes a positive and respectful discussion. You may even want to put the “rules” in writing and distribute them to the group.

• **Encourage members to attend each meeting,** whether or not they have completed the book and/or film. Talking about why you didn’t start or finish the work may contribute as much as the comments of those who did.

• **Use social networking.** Create a listserv, a landing page on your library’s website, or a social networking site so people can easily find out about upcoming sessions and chat further about the book or film.

• **Eat, drink, and be merry!** Food and drink help to keep the club informal and fun. A local restaurant or coffeehouse may be willing to donate all or part of the refreshments, or invite members to bring snacks. (As always, be aware of food allergies and sensitivities. Clearly mark food and drink ingredients.)
Especially for Librarians

Consider these questions to decide what kind of club is right for you and your community:

- **What goals do you hope a Masterpiece Book & Film Club will achieve for your library?** Are you trying to offer more options for patrons, or are you trying to attract new audiences (see below)? Do you want to make your library more visible, provide benefits for a new partner organization, or capitalize on the promotion for an upcoming Masterpiece broadcast? Once you’ve defined your goals, you can map out the steps needed to attain them.

- **What library resources are available?** Consider staff time and funding; book, video, or DVD availability; meeting locations; publicity; audiovisual equipment; and so on.

- **Who is your key audience**—new patrons, existing members, young adults, students, seniors, or a combination of these groups? After you have identified the audience, you can shape your club as needed.

- **What is the focus of your club?** Is it to encourage people to read and explore new genres, titles, or authors? Is it to analyze writing styles and filmmaking techniques? Once you determine the focus, you’ll be able to more easily select the right titles and format for the club.

- **What support can community partners offer?** You may be able to find funding, publicity, volunteers, participants, or donations of food and materials through local partners. Remember, you don’t have to do it all alone! (See Community Partners, below.)

Innovative Ideas

Try these variations with your Masterpiece Book & Film Club.

**Launch a “Community Reads” Campaign**

A “Community Reads” campaign—known by various names, including “One Book” or “The Big Read”—brings members of a city, town, or neighborhood together to read and discuss the same book at the same time. The “One Book” movement began in 1998 when Nancy Pearl, executive director of the Washington Center for the Book in the Seattle Public Library, initiated “If All Seattle Read the Same Book.” (For more information, see Resources.)

Although launching a campaign like this requires a commitment from both the library and community partners, the results can be very gratifying. Using a Masterpiece title can provide additional publicity and media tie-in possibilities, with your local PBS station and beyond. For detailed instructions and guidance on planning a Community Reads campaign, see the American Library Association’s “One Book, One Community” guide.
Focus on Film

Rather than selecting a book-based Masterpiece title, you may want to hold a film-only discussion group. Members may relish talking about such beloved series as Downton Abbey, Upstairs Downstairs, Foyle’s War, or Prime Suspect, despite the fact that there is no accompanying book. The Masterpiece website has many useful features, including interviews and background information, to help you develop discussion questions and activities.

Invite a Scholar

Science cafés are live—and lively—events that take place in casual settings such as pubs and coffeehouses, featuring a brief presentation by a scientist, followed by Q&A. (For more about science cafés, visit http://www.sciencecafes.org/.) Using the same model, invite a local author, or a scholar of literature, media studies, popular culture, drama, or film, to lead or answer questions about a particular novel, author, genre, or film.

Prepare Book & Film Club Kits

If you are a librarian and would like to cater to various book & film clubs in your community, you may want to consider putting together a Book & Film Club Kit. It could contain multiple copies of books and/or DVDs, plus background information, discussion questions, and activities. (You can download a specific Masterpiece Book & Film Club Guide, which is ideal for this purpose.) A designated book club leader could borrow the entire kit for his or her members.

Community Partners

Partners can enhance the variety and amount of materials you offer to the group, expand the number or types of activities, and help publicize the new initiative. Partners benefit from increased exposure in the community and more business from library patrons or members of your group.

Local Government

The mayor’s office, town representatives, or other local officials can assist you by helping to spread the word by endorsing your Masterpiece Book & Film Club. If you’d like to create a “Community Reads” campaign (where everyone in town reads the same book/watches the same film at the same time—see “Community Reads Campaigns” above), you will want to enlist community leaders to join in the effort.
**Media Partners**

Your local PBS station may be interested in cohosting a Masterpiece Book & Film Club. Check to see if you can coordinate with any events planned for upcoming Masterpiece premieres. Your PBS or NPR station may also be able to do on-air promotion; link to the club via their Facebook page, Twitter feed, or blog; host a call-in radio show; provide a space for a screening or meeting; or place announcements in their publications. Other local newspaper and radio events listings can also reach a wide audience.

**Schools**

Many Masterpiece titles are already part of the middle and/or high school curriculum. Contact the school librarian or the English, drama, or media studies department about a possible collaboration. You can invite students to attend the club, help launch the initiative, or provide technological or audiovisual assistance. If you are a librarian, you may also be interested in offering a school-based club for young adults. Colleges and universities may be interested in cosponsoring a club or may be able to offer professors and/or graduate students as guest speakers or to help facilitate meetings. Be sure to pre-screen films to make sure they are appropriate for younger audiences.

**Chamber of Commerce/Local Businesses**

Local businesses can be a great resource for your Masterpiece Book & Film Club. A printing/copy shop might be willing to produce flyers or posters. A grocery store or coffee shop may donate refreshments. A bookstore may be willing to copresent the club. Businesses can post flyers or provide meeting space. Meet with local vendors and make a presentation about your Masterpiece Book & Film Club, the kinds of services you need, and what benefits a partnership could bring.

**Continuing Education Courses**

Your town may offer courses for adults and/or seniors. You may want to collaborate by offering your Masterpiece Book & Film Club through this venue.

**Historical Society or Museum**

The local historical society or museum may be able to infuse local history into your discussions. For instance, if you are exploring Our Town, Great Expectations, or The Diary of Anne Frank, compare the descriptions of life in small-town 20th-century America, Victorian England, or World War II–era Europe with what was happening in your town at that time.
Local Drama or Theatre Group
A local drama or theatre group may be interested in being part of a Masterpiece Book & Film Club. Members can offer insights from the perspective of an actor, director, or playwright. It may even be possible to coordinate your club with a local production of a related play.

Faith-based Institutions
Local churches, synagogues, and mosques may be interested in hosting a Masterpiece Book & Film Club or providing space for the club and encouraging their members to join.

Senior Centers/Assisted-Living Facilities
The activities director at a senior center or assisted-living facility may be interested in cohosting the club. Reach out to whoever is in charge of programming.

Working with Partners
You may or may not have worked with partners before. These tips will help you avoid pitfalls and have a successful relationship with your partners.

• Be specific about what the project is, the kind of help you would like, and what you are offering in return, such as greater exposure in the community, an enhanced reputation for the other organization, more customers, and so on. Be specific as to what you can provide, such as a company’s name and/or logo on publicity materials, acknowledgment of the company or organization at each meeting, etc.

• Establish a contact person at the partner organization and determine roles and expectations about the partnership. Spelling out the specifics of the relationship with a letter of agreement or memo can clarify each party’s responsibilities and avoid misunderstandings.

• Determine what and how many resources—time, money, volunteers, space, and so on—each group will contribute.

• Develop a timeline for your work together. (Note: Media partners often require a long lead-time for print and on-air promotion.)

• Look for opportunities to tie into your partners’ existing events and initiatives. For instance, many towns hold street fairs, festivals, or farmers’ markets in the summer or fall. Ask if you can use this event to publicize and recruit people to join your Masterpiece Book & Film Club.
• Discuss ahead of time how you will evaluate the success of the project and your partnership.

• Check in after the club’s first meeting and regularly thereafter to make sure each partner feels comfortable with the relationship and the initiative.

Publicity and Promotion
There are many ways to promote your Masterpiece Book & Film Club. The following suggestions are aimed at librarians, but can be adapted for your particular situation.

• Create and distribute flyers. Ask volunteers and/or community partners to help distribute and post the flyers around town.

• Set up an attractive display in the library using copies of the book, DVDs, videos, or tune-in information, and club sign-up sheets. In addition to the title itself, you may want to add related books—for instance, a biography of the author, a cookbook, or works that give historical background.

• Post notices online via the library’s website and newsletter, partner websites and newsletters, town or city websites, neighborhood listservs, social networking sites, and local newspapers. You may want to ask your local PBS station to include information about your Masterpiece Book & Film Club in its program guide or membership listserv.

• Encourage the local newspaper to do a feature story on the club. Invite a reporter to one of your meetings, or pitch an “angle” that may be of interest, such as your collaboration with your local PBS station, the participation of a local guest speaker, a unique theme, and so on.

• Staff a table at a book fair, arts/craft fair, or other cultural event where you can distribute flyers and talk with potential members.
Exploring Literature and Film

You can use these general questions to facilitate any discussion, no matter what books you read or films you watch.

**Close-Up**

1. Ask each member of the group to share two or three phrases or lines of dialogue to describe the main character. What do these short descriptions say about the character’s personality?

2. What relationships are important in this story? How do they move the plot forward?

3. Do the characters in this book or film ever surprise you? If they do, are their actions believable?

4. How are characters and events influenced by the past in the story or film you’re examining?

5. Setting a story in a particular time and place can profoundly influence characters and events. How big a role does the setting play in this novel or film?

6. Imagine the events in the story unfolding at a different historical time and in a different location. How would that change the plot, and how would it affect the characters in the story?

7. If you are discussing a book, choose several short passages to read aloud that seem characteristic of the writer’s style. What strikes you about the way the writer uses language? If you are viewing a film, what scenes are emblematic of the director’s or screenwriter’s vision of the story?

**The Artist’s Craft**

1. How does the writer use language and the filmmaker use images to create mood? How are description and dialogue handled? Do the style and the subject matter suit each other or do they seem at odds?

2. Novels often focus on the inner lives of their characters, allowing us to enter their thoughts and feelings. A film must translate this interior world into visual images. How does this particular film portray the inner reality of its characters?
3 What challenges do you think the filmmaker faced when adapting this novel to film?

4 What enduring themes are explored? What lasting images, lessons, or messages did this novel or film leave with you?

5 Based on your reading or viewing of this one work, what might you presume to know about its creator?

6 What questions about morality does this work of literature or film raise? Are any answers offered?

The Big Picture

1 Do you think there is such a thing as an “essential self”—a unique individual identity—or do you think identity is the result of life experience? What influences do forces such as socioeconomic class, gender, race, religion, and family background exert upon the characters in this story?

2 A work of literature or a film can offer us the chance to experience a world different from our own. Did this work expose you to new attitudes, points of view, people, environments, or cultures? What did you learn?

3 If you’re reading this book or seeing the film for a second (or third) time, how has your response to it changed? What do you think has caused that shift?

4 What flaws do you see in this book or film? If you were acting as an editor, producer, or director of this work, what would you have added, changed, or eliminated?

5 Some books and films are unforgettable, and others entertain us but leave no lasting impression. Which kind of work was this for you?

6 What did you think of this story’s ending? Was it satisfying to you? Why or why not? If not, how would you have changed it?

7 Ask group members to share a favorite scene in the book or film with the group. What makes it powerful, interesting, shocking, funny, or otherwise memorable?
Resources

Books


Jacobsohn, Rachel W. *The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Start Your Own Book Club*. Hyperion, 1998. The author has led reading groups for 20 years, and her discussion of group dynamics is especially helpful.


Pearl, Nancy. *Book Lust: Recommended Reading for Every Mood, Moment and Reason*. Sasquatch Books, 2003. These book lists were compiled by the dynamic librarian who created the library program “If All Seattle Read the Same Book,” which served as an inspiration for similar programs around the country. See also *More Book Lust* and *Book Crush for Kids and Teens* by the same author.


**Articles**


**Selected Websites**

Along with an increase in the popularity of face-to-face book & film clubs, there has also been an explosion of online book & film clubs and resources. These sites will help you get started. See also the Learning Links in the Teachers section of the Masterpiece website. (Note that websites and URLs frequently change. These sites were verified as of 2011.)

**BookBuffet**

www.bookbuffet.com

BookBuffet is a news and social networking site for book groups and avid readers. It offers literary news, book reviews, author interview podcasts, and a free set of tools for registered book groups to help them organize, connect, keep an archive of books they read, share book reviews and ratings, and purchase books online.

**BookClubGirl**

www.bookclubgirl.com

This blog and online radio channel shares news on books, interviews with authors, and tips for book clubs.

**Book Club Queen**

www.book-club-queen.com

This site helps readers learn about book clubs and locate local clubs, find recommendations of great book club books, and connect with popular authors in exclusive interviews. In the “Life Between My Pages” newsletter, authors share their own personal stories.

**Book-Clubs-Resource**

www.book-clubs-resource.com

This site contains information on starting and running an in-person or online book club, links to reading groups, and reading group guides.
Book Group Buzz
http://bookgroupbuzz.booklistonline.com/
This blog, created by the well-respected professional journal Booklist, features a blog about books, plus thousands of book reviews for librarians, book groups, and book lovers.

Book Movement
www.bookmovement.com
This site tracks the most popular book selections of 16,000 book clubs nationwide and provides a reading guide for each book with discussion questions, reviews from book clubs, author notes, and more. The site also offers monthly book giveaways, tips for running a book club, and free private web pages for book clubs.

Book Spot
www.bookspot.com
This site offers useful links for book reviews, author interviews, reading lists, and publishing lists.

The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress
http://read.gov/cfb/
Each of the 50 states has a State Center for the Book dedicated to promoting books, literature, and literacy. Check out the resources on the site, as well as the “One Book Projects Grow in Popularity” article.

ESO Book Club at the General Federation of Women’s Clubs
www.GFWC.org/ESO
Epsilon Sigma Omicron (ESO) is a national honorary literary society made up of community volunteers in all 50 states who participate in reading clubs and activities for literary interest and self-enrichment.

Goodreads
http://www.goodreads.com/
This popular social media site provides a way to record what you are reading, recommend titles, and post reviews, as well as to join a variety of book club groups.

The Great Books Foundation
www.greatbooks.org
Founded in 1947, the Great Books Foundation uses a Shared Inquiry™ discussion approach, anthologies, guides, and workshops for book group leaders. Their audiences range from K–12 students, to groups at colleges and universities, to more informal book groups.
Internet Public Library
http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48523
The updated site provides helpful links to book club and discussion sites, online books, book reviews, and more.

Oprah's Book Club
Even though the Oprah Book Club is no longer on the air, you can find book suggestions and videos of previous author visits and book discussions, as well as book club guides.

Reader's Circle
www.readerscircle.org
This site provides local listings for book clubs and author events in the United States, Canada, and Australia.

Reading Group Choices
www.readinggroupchoices.com
This site suggests books and discussion topics for reading groups. Its annual guide is distributed to libraries, reading groups, bookstores, community book festivals, and individuals.

Reading Group Guides
www.readinggroupguides.com
This site offers advice and tips for running a book club, plus discussion questions and recipes for hundreds of books.

Seattle Public Library
This portion of the library site is dedicated to “Book Group How-tos” and offers tips on getting started, choosing books, coming up with good discussion questions, and more.

National Women's Book Association
http://www.wnba-books.org/
In October, the WNBA holds a series of events to celebrate National Reading Group Month. Contact the national organization or local chapter to find out how to coordinate with them.
Credits

The Masterpiece Book & Film Club Handbook was produced by the Education Department of WGBH. It is based on two previous Masterpiece guides: Book & Film Club (2003) and Book & Film Club II (2004).

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