



*Bonne Maman*<sup>®</sup>

*Traditional French Pâtisserie*

# BIG READ 10

in association with

VINTAGE CLASSICS

**The Bonne Maman Big Read is part of The Times Cheltenham Literature Festival 2010 and will culminate at the festival in October, with special events about this year's chosen title, *Far From the Madding Crowd*. As part of the project, we hope to inspire your thirst for reading and literary discussion; we hope these simple steps about forming a book group will help you on your way...**

Tired of hearing about other people's book clubs? Don't let those pseudo-intellectuals/fun-loving stop-outs make you feel small. Set up one of your own: it really couldn't be easier.

The first thing to do is to get together with a few friends. These might be work-based colleagues, mums at a play group or newly retired neighbours. Do you want it single sex or mixed? Do you want new members to be agreed on unanimously, or simply to come along at the invitation of a member? It's a good idea to start small - even just three or four is okay - as people will soon want to join when they see what a great time you're having!

## WHEN

Next, decide how often you want to meet up. This will depend on how long you think it will take you all to read a book. It might be every four weeks, every six weeks, or every two months. Reading books can be surprisingly hard to fit in to some people's busy lives, so don't be too ambitious to start with. The last thing you want is for members to stop coming because they feel guilty at not having managed more than the first paragraph.

## WHERE

Having decided on your group, you will need to choose where you are going to meet. This could be in a coffee bar or in a pub, but be sensitive to landlords who don't want you to linger for three hours over one drink - or to inhibit the regulars by mouthing off loudly about Kafka. It is far less stilted to meet in each other's houses. Don't panic! This usually means you will only have to host one book group per year (which gives you twelve months to vacuum), and there is absolutely no need for a full scale meal (although some book clubs push the boat out on this one): nibbles and bring-a-bottle or coffee and biscuits are quite enough to set the scene for a hearty session.



## HOW

Of course the ideal first book for your group is this year's selected novel for the Bonne Maman Big Read, which is Thomas Hardy's dark passionate romance, *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

It's a good idea to take it in turns to choose a book, and to establish a rota early on. Of course this will change as new people join the group, but it means everyone gets a chance to suggest something they would enjoy reading, and everyone gets to sample books they might never have picked out for themselves.

Obtaining books should not be too difficult. It's simply not cricket to choose an unknown book which has been out of print for twelve years, and a book that's only available new in hardback will be too pricey for some members. Some bookshops and online services offer discounts for book groups of more than six, although it can be easier for people to get their own copies. And don't forget second hand book shops and the good old local lending libraries!

Some members might like to offer a choice between two books when it's their turn to suggest a read, in case too many people have already read one of them. On the other hand, re-reading a book can be an interesting experience in itself.

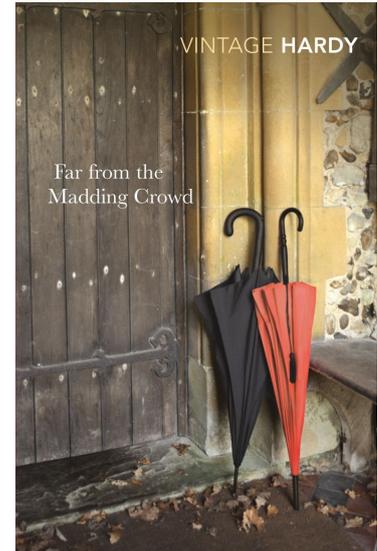
Each book group has its own house rules. Some choose fiction only, others non-fiction, biography and poetry. Some have a mini 'Booker' award at the end of the year for the favourite read voted by members, and some wrap up mystery books at Christmas to exchange as gifts. Some talk about the chosen book all evening, others discuss it for five minutes before moving on to local gossip.

However yours turns out, it is important to be generous with one another. Not only will people's tastes vary widely, but so will opinions. What animates one person will make another keel over with boredom. Arguments will take place - and that is no bad thing. Debate is what a book group is all about - in theory - and unravelling different views is a fascinating and rewarding way to get to know one another. It's equally important to be understanding when some members simply have not had time to read the book in question. This will happen to everyone at some time or another, and it is good to have a policy of making everyone welcome anyway. (I've enjoyed many a session having only managed to read the title, and come away with a real urge to read the whole book.) In any case, a book group is only partially about reading together: the need to share ideas about a book is a wonderful excuse to get together and enjoy each other's company, with a mug of tea and a delicious cake or biscuit.

**Good luck!**

Jane Bailey and the Literature Festival team!

## CHELTENHAM FESTIVALS



**Register your group and receive a sample of Bonne Maman biscuits!**

**Send your name and address to [bigread@cheltenhamfestivals.com](mailto:bigread@cheltenhamfestivals.com)**

