

## Shmanners 186: Book Clubs

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**Teresa:** What did you think of the book?

**Travis:** I didn't read it.

**Teresa:** Neither did I.

**Travis:** More wine?

**Teresa:** It's Shmanners!

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

**Teresa:** And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

**Travis:** And you're listening to Shmanners!

**Teresa:** It's extraordinary etiquette...

**Travis:** ... for ordinary occasions. Hello, my dove.

**Teresa:** Hello, dear. Do you know that when we planned the joke...

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** You pointed to your—

**Travis:** Yes, listen. I realize now—

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** The reason Teresa is laughing is, we went back and I said like, three different times, "Okay, you'll say this, and then I'll say this, and then—" And then as soon as I hit record, I was sure Teresa went first, even though I was supposed to go first.

**Teresa:** [still laughing]

**Travis:** It wasn't until I finished the joke that I realized I was wrong. [sighs] Listen, everybody, let us first lead off by saying, we know this episode is going up on a Sunday. And technically, it's still last week's episode, but it's going up on Sunday. We apologize for that. We have friends in town. It was my birthday weekend. I traveled to go to Orlando. A lot happened this week.

Um, and y'know what? I'm glad we were able to get this episode done at all. Um, so, thank you for your patience, for your understanding, and for your ongoing support. You are great, and I'll take it as my birthday present, your patience. Uh, so, thank you.

**Teresa:** [laughs again]

**Travis:** How are you, Teresa?

**Teresa:** Ohh, man. It feels like we skipped fall here in Cincinnati and went straight to winter.

**Travis:** Mm, that is fair. And y'know, what's better when it's cold and gray outside than cuddling up with a nice book next to, I don't know, a fire? Or, probably a TV, or a space heater, or a dog?

**Teresa:** Y'know what? I have a three year old. I haven't read a book in like... three years. [laughs]

**Travis:** This is fair. Now, I—here's the thing. And I'm sure we'll come back to this over and over and over again. Uh, like, ten years ago, I made the switch from like, reading a physical book to audiobooks, and I've never looked back.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** Now, I will acknowledge that I think listening versus reading are two different sensory experiences. Right? But...

**Teresa:** They're enjoyable in their own ways.

**Travis:** Right. As far as like, gathering the information from the book, I think it is equal. `Cause that's the thing – I do think sitting down, reading a book, um, y'know, reading a physical book, and like, getting lost in the fantasy world, or lost in the narrative or whatever, is different from like, putting on a book while you drive, y'know? Yes, admittedly. But I think that you can still say, "I read the book." Y'know? "I have consumed the book."

**Teresa:** I think so too. I think so too. And especially, uh, we're talking about book clubs.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Especially if it's—if it's about... wanting to get together and discussing the book, I think they're completely equal.

**Travis:** Yeah. Especially since, as you said, in this day and age—in this day and age. I'm, y'know, I've got a kid, I work a lot... even if I have the time to sit down and like, read a physical book, my brain would then immediately go, "Do you know how many other things we're supposed to be doing?"

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Most recently, the book I finished and absolutely loved and enjoyed, if we're talking about books you should read, is Medallion Status by John Hodgman. It's his new book. It is wonderful, funny, and inspiring, and at times, touching. And if you haven't read it, also Vacation Land by John Hodgman, another excellent one. Um, also, Embrace Your Weird by Felicia Day. Lots of good ones.

Um, now, here's the thing I will tell you – I've never been in what I would consider like, an official—like, an actual book club.

**Teresa:** I have!

**Travis:** I know you have. So you will be providing a lot more experience. The closest I think I've come is like, discussing, um, like, summer reading. Discussing reading in like, class.

**Teresa:** Okay.

**Travis:** And also, I was in a Facebook group that Lin Manuel Miranda started of like, "We're gonna read through all the Shakespeare works and discuss it here in the Facebook group," and I quickly lost track. [laughs]

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** I quickly fell off the path.

**Teresa:** How does that man have time for that?

**Travis:** I don't know. I definitely didn't, so I don't know what to tell you.

**Teresa:** [laughing]

**Travis:** Now, we're gonna discuss the history first, as we always do.

**Teresa:** As we always do.

**Travis:** This is one of those where, if you told me book clubs started in 1940, I'd believe you. And if you told me that they originated in like, ancient Egypt, I'd believe you.

**Teresa:** Well, okay, they didn't really have books in ancient Egypt.

**Travis:** Yes, I know. This is wall club. Where we read the walls.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Where we read the walls. Um, I... and uh... so, okay. The printing press was invented in the 1400s.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** That is when books in the form that we know today began to exist.

**Travis:** Yes. Because before that, it was—

**Teresa:** So let's start there.

**Travis:** 'Cause before that, it was all like, hand-written, hand-copied by like, monks and stuff.

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** Normal people didn't own books. They were kept in like, y'know, vaults and fancy monk monastery libraries and like, castle libraries, 'cause they were so expensive and difficult to produce.

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** So the idea of saying, "Let's get together and read a book," is like, nooo.

**Teresa:** Also, literacy wasn't something that the common man was really interested in. It wasn't, uh, y'know, instrumental for survival.

**Travis:** Why didn't they do audiobooks?

**Teresa:** [long pause] So, there wasn't any real reason...

**Travis:** You said for my birthday you would laugh at some of my jokes!

**Teresa:** Mmm, you're gonna have to work harder than that.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, there wasn't any reason to read a book, and you were busy! Y'know?

**Travis:** Yeah. Just trying not to die.

**Teresa:** Exactly. Um, so, y'know, when you said, if you told me it was the 1940s, you'd believe me. I think that the vision of book clubs that we have today revolves around women. Um, and so, one of the things that you mentioned specifically when we started this, we were like, "Oprah's book club!"

**Travis:** Oprah's book club, yes.

**Teresa:** Um, we'll touch on that just a little bit.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, but let's go to the idea of the woman book club for a while.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** In... there's a New Yorker article called "Turning the Page: How Women Became Readers," by author Joan Acocella.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Where they point out that women's history really revolves around this access to literacy, right?

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** The two points that are made is like, literacy and birth control. Like, these are the two like, turning points in women's history. Because, um,

before mass media, like, y'know, internet, radio, stuff like that, reading meant access to the world.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Right? If you were relegated to like, the gender sphere of women in the home, versus men in the world, books were the way that you got... there was a bridge there.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** And so, also—

**Travis:** And once again, because we're speaking in terms of like, y'know, '30s, '40s, '50s, we're speaking in the gender binary that they would've thought about at that time.

**Teresa:** Oh, also, the middle ages. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah, also—yeah, also the middle ages.

**Teresa:** Like... [laughing] So, um, when you talk about access to the world as far as gender spheres go, there has always been this kind of, uh, the... the home-relegated gender being, "I want access," and the world-relegated gender saying, "Uh, no, we don't want you to have access."

**Travis:** Yes. It's almost like it's like a power thing?

**Teresa:** Yeah, it's almost like a power thing?

**Travis:** It's almost like a... yeah. Hmmm.

**Teresa:** So, the pendulum goes back and forth and back and forth. Um, speaking of the middle ages, there has been a few, uh, let's say passages cited in the New Testament that said women were not meant to preach.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And it was very easy for the church at the time to say, "See?"

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Um, so then, like... It was like, we don't have many books, but you guys—the women don't want them anyway, because the Bible says you shouldn't.

**Travis:** Alright.

**Teresa:** Giving the church more power to, y'know, rule people's lives, because you had to go through the middleman of the clergymen. Right?

**Travis:** Yeah, almost like they wrote their own rule, and then pointed to the rule of like, "See, that's the rule. I don't know what to tell you."

**Teresa:** Mmmm-hmmmm. Um, but literacy for women was feared in different ways. A big worry was that, if a woman could read, she could do it by herself.

**Travis:** Uh, okay.

**Teresa:** Which might lead her to thinking on her own.

**Travis:** Oh no.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Oh boy.

**Teresa:** And then, if a woman can think on her own, what more does she want?

**Travis:** Then there will be no stopping her!



**Teresa:** [laughing] What if they knew enough to run their own businesses and choose their own husbands?! What would happen?

**Travis:** I can't even—cats and dogs, living together. Chaos.

**Teresa:** [laughing] Okay. Thankfully, the pendulum swang—swang. *Swung* back and forth between these two enough so that, um, one of the original US book clubs was started in 1634 by a religious renegade named Anne Hutchinson.

**Travis:** Oh yeah! I know of Anne Hutchinson. From *Drunk History*, I believe.

**Teresa:** That's right! That's right. Um, so, she was mostly interested in intellectual analysis of the Bible, being the daughter of a clergyman. And so, she would invite other women over to her home in Massachusetts Bay Colony, and analyze and often criticize the sermons that were given at the weekly services.

**Travis:** And I bet the religious leaders loooved iit.

**Teresa:** Uhhh... no.

**Travis:** Not so much.

**Teresa:** Uh, but eventually, she did open these up to men as well. But uh, they were eventually condemned, right? Because women thinking... can't have that.

**Travis:** Not only thinking, but criticizing, y'know, the sermons. The ones written, questioning the things said.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Yeah. But this train would not be stopped. Uh, later on in the late 1760s, Hannah Adams became the first American woman to earn a living through writing, and she would host a reading circle in her village.

In 1778, Hannah Mather Crocker organized a similar female reading group in Boston. And she took the radical position that women's formal study of science and literature was much more suitable to their status than whether or not they could make a good meal or so.

**Travis:** Huh. Wow.

**Teresa:** So, this is the time where I think about, um, that line in *Pride and Prejudice*, but um, "I hardly knew a woman who people didn't say she was accomplished."

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** Because you had to have like the—the—must read extensively, paint, draw, sew, play an instrument...

**Travis:** And basically, if you were a dude, you just needed to have some money that you hadn't gambled away. [laughs]

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** And then you were like, killin' it. [laughing]

**Teresa:** Yeah. Um, so, let's go over to Europe for a second.

**Travis:** Woowoowoowoo!

**Teresa:** Bloopbloopbloopbloop! Um, so, Europe had, especially in the UK, had some tumultuous times where um, it depended on really who was in power. So, you have the Cromwell years, where actually, women were allowed to attend universities, they were encouraged to read and become educated. And then, you have the Restoration, where they were like, "Uh, mm, mmmm, no. This is not... this is not good for us menfolk. So, now you can't go to universities." But book clubs remained.

And the idea of educating women was still important in the way of business, because a lot of the, y'know, the UK at that time was about the spice trade,

and um, shipping, and all the kind of stuff. I mean, Britain was fighting wars for like, centuries about shipping routes. So they wanted women to learn math and reading so that they could take stock and balance of ledgers, and it wasn't unusual for a merchant to leave his business to his wife or daughter when he left or passed away.

**Travis:** Right. Well, you also have to imagine, I mean, this is just me inferring. But you have to imagine like, if I was a merchant or somebody who was gonna go on a ship journey for like, six or seven months, I would want my wife to like, know how to keep the ledgers balanced and stuff while I was gone.

**Teresa:** Mm-hmm.

**Travis:** So I didn't come back and be like, "Where is all our money?"

**Teresa:** Exactly.

**Travis:** 'Cause like, I can't check my bank balance while I'm gone, y'know what I mean?

**Teresa:** Um, but this was more about uh, again, survival, like you said. You didn't want the money to go away.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Education in general was not something that women were offered through much of Europe's history. So what happened was, they turned to kind of like, educating each other on the sly using needlepoint.

**Travis:** What, really?

**Teresa:** Yeah! Um, so, have you seen—I'm sure you have. There—every once in a while on Antique Road Show comes up a needlepoint sampler.

**Travis:** Yes. Oh, so you could read!

**Teresa:** Yeah!

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** So, in order to do the needlepoint, you had to learn, basically, the alphabet, 'cause that was part of the sampler, right? You would go through alphabet, numbers, sometimes Bible passages, things like that. And it was a way to kind of mothers teach their daughters how to read while doing something, quote, "acceptable" within their gender sphere.

**Travis:** Okay. Yes.

**Teresa:** Yeah! And y'know, no men were like, paying attention to this kind of stuff, so you could even slip secret messages, or I don't know, like, symbols and letters and who knows what. No one was watching. So you do what you need to do. [laughs]

**Travis:** This is all – I want you to know – fascinating to me.

**Teresa:** Oh good!

**Travis:** I am, right now in the middle of it, I'll just say, loving this episode.

**Teresa:** Wonderful! Um, okay. So, during the Enlightenment, this is when the pendulum really swung toward, everybody can be educated and—

**Travis:** And everyone *should* be educated.

**Teresa:** Everyone *should* be educated. Um, and we've talked a little bit about salons and um, like, penny universities and coffee shops and things like that. Um, but... when uh, when women really were welcomed into this salon kind of atmosphere in Paris was when this really could like, blossom, right?

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** And in fact, beauty salons may have gotten their name from the discussions that happen in these literary salons.

**Travis:** Yes, that makes sense. This all tracks.

**Teresa:** Um, okay. But it didn't like, magically fix everything.

**Travis:** No.

**Teresa:** Right? Some of the famous salons were held and hosted by women. But y'know, there was still like... there was... [sighs] Still this kind of... elitism between men and women of the time, where women were like, "Oh, but they're just getting together to, y'know, gossip and talk, and they're not really doing the kind of intellectual study that we are."

**Travis:** Mm-hmm. Well, and that's another thing, too, if you think about like... I always think about like the uh, oh, why is the name escaping me? The... Algonquin round table, right? If you think about the like, female thinkers and philosophers and stuff, and y'know, notable quotables throughout life, throughout history, they were always seen more of like, "Isn't it unique that this woman is able to philosophize with these men?"

Whereas, it was kind of just, "Yeah, of course men can do it." Y'know, like, that kind of thing. It was viewed as like, unique and outstanding when a woman could play in the same field as the guys.

**Teresa:** Yeah. Hold her own, is the idea.

**Travis:** right.

**Teresa:** Well, so, what really turned this around was a best-selling book.

**Travis:** Uh-huh.

**Teresa:** So, an 18<sup>th</sup> century sex farce called Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded.

**Travis:** Man, we need to go back to giving books two titles. That was always in Shakespeare, too. I miss that. Like, it's this... or, this! Whichever! You choose. It's up to you.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, so, it was about a young servant girl being romantically pursued by her employer. And the story was so popular that people would read it aloud in groups together, sometimes reading like, fan fiction spin-offs.

**Travis:** Oh wow, really?

**Teresa:** Or playing with Pamela playing cards, and drinking from Pamela mugs. And like, London exploded with this story. Y'know, like Harry Potter.

**Travis:** Yeah. Exactly like Harry Potter.

**Teresa:** [laughs] It's a little different from Harry Potter.

**Travis:** I mean, subject matter, yes.

**Teresa:** Yes. Um, so, like, this—the advent of this book really made it so that everybody enjoyed the subject, everybody loved the reading. They would read it together. It became like, not just book club, but story time.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, and so, this kept the ball rolling for education purposes. And one of the other really, like, famous and long-standing book clubs in the US was founded by a group of ladies in Illinois in 1877, called The Women's Reading Book Club of Mattoon.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** And it is still going today.

**Travis:** Oh wow!

**Teresa:** Making it the longest-running book club in the country.

**Travis:** Okay!

**Teresa:** And they're really focused on books that are available to the masses. Things that are not like, intellectually dense, but still relevant to culture, right?

**Travis:** Right. Like 50 Shades of Gray.

**Teresa:** Sure. I guess.

**Travis:** I don't know.

**Teresa:** I don't know. [laughs]

**Travis:** That just always seems like one of just like—

**Teresa:** I didn't look up the titles that they're currently hosting.

**Travis:** That there was just a time period where it seemed like everyone read that book.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** It's just a go-to reference for me.

**Teresa:** Not me. I didn't read that book.

**Travis:** I didn't either. Just seemed—it seemed—

**Teresa:** Okay, so not everyone.

**Travis:** It seemed like everyone read it. At least, everyone was aware of the title. It's not important. I don't know why we're talking about 50 Shades of Gray.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** It's okay. Just forget about it.

**Teresa:** [laughing] Okay. Another thing that really helped book clubs in the US was the idea of correspondence universities.

**Travis:** Mm-hmm.

**Teresa:** Because y'know, the US is a large expanse of land from sea to sea. And so, a lot of rural communities didn't have the same access that maybe metropolitan areas did. Also, people lived a lot further apart. They were, y'know... there was just... without the transportation, you really couldn't go anywhere. But, there was the post, and if you were able to contact a correspondence university, you could get a sort of degree.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Um, so, like, this was called the Chautauqua movement, I think.

**Travis:** Okay. Sure.

**Teresa:** There's a lot of vowels in this word. [laughs] Uh, so, it was the institute, Chautauqua, New York, that created an adult educational movement where men and women could assemble to basically give themselves their own university education.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Uh, they would assign books in areas of science, literature, history, economics, Latin, y'know, whatever they felt was relevant to the degree that they had agreed on. Um, and you would organize it yourself. So this was



kind of like they were handling the book club business, and you were getting together and doing your book club.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** Um, after four years, if you had read all the books and passed some tests, you could get your degree. And this was still popular in the 1920s, and today, even still selects nine books for study a year for its national book club. Now, you can't get the degree from the book club.

**Travis:** But you can read the books.

**Teresa:** But you can read the books and participate in the discussions with people all across the US.

**Travis:** Now, before we go to questions, audience questions... you promised me you'd tell me about Oprah's book club.

**Teresa:** Mmm... [disgruntled mumbling]

**Travis:** What's the deal with Oprah's book club? Is it a book club?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Travis:** Or is it just a sticker on books?

**Teresa:** It is a book club. Um, in 1996, she launched the first televised book club with the novel, *The Deep End of the Ocean*.

**Travis:** Great title.

**Teresa:** Yeah.

**Travis:** It's evocative, but also nonsense.

**Teresa:** [laughs] To date, the book club has two million members and 81 books on the list.

**Travis:** How do they schedule that?

**Teresa:** You don't all get together at once.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs] But, you can join the book club and get the lists and make your own Oprah's book club...

**Travis:** ... club.

**Teresa:** Club.

**Travis:** Got it.

**Teresa:** Right. Um, and it's... y'know, it's awesome that Oprah created this kind of commercial movement for empowering people to read books. Um, she has gone through like, different classics, different genres. Uh, she has her favorite authors, of course. Um, some have seen it as a kind of marketing campaign—

**Travis:** Oh, absolutely.

**Teresa:** --to influence the New York Times best-seller list.

**Travis:** Oh, absolutely it is. But I don't think that the two can be... I don't think it's mutually exclusive, y'know? You get an endorsement from Oprah? It's big.

**Teresa:** It is big.

**Travis:** I don't know if everyone knows this. Oprah is very popular.

**Teresa:** She is very popular, but there have been some bumps in the road. Several authors who she has recommended have um, relegated her recommendation to the, y'know, kind of middle-aged, middle-class white woman biddies that tend to uh, in theory, represent her audience, right? And so, knocking down its prestige.

**Travis:** Mmm.

**Teresa:** But y'know, I mean, it's cool to read, so...

**Travis:** Yeah. There—hey. There you have it, folks. It's cool to read. Teresa said it.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Alright, let's go do some thank you notes, and then, some questions.

[theme music plays]

**Travis:** Shmammers is sponsored in part this week by Quip. Listen, we love Quip. I say it every time we talk about them. But we use it. I love it.

**Teresa:** We do.

**Travis:** Here's the thing. Listen, I could read these copy points. I could, and it would be great. But instead, I'm gonna speak from the heart.

**Teresa:** Ohh.

**Travis:** I have, in my life, have had many, many a tooth problem. Be it cavities, be it some gum issues... it's happened. It's been bad. But then I found Quip, and not only is Quip effective, it's easy. It makes it easy to take good care of your teeth, because it is a gentle vibration instead of like, one of those electric toothbrushes that feels like you're jackhammering your gums.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Quip is gentle, and it has a built-in timer to let you know when to move from section to section, and let you know when you have done the appropriate two-minute time brushing your teeth. And it's also—Quip makes my favorite toothpaste.

**Teresa:** Did you know that pregnant women are more susceptible to gingivitis as a hormonal condition?

**Travis:** I didn't know that.

**Teresa:** And I have really been enjoying Quip. Uh, their toothbrush heads have these little like, plastic-y kind of massager things on the sides. It's been great for my gums. Lot less bleeding.

**Travis:** Perfect. And speaking of the Quip brush heads, they have a program where you can get a new one every three months, which is dentist recommended, and frankly... listen. Everybody raise your hands if you're replacing your toothbrush every three months.

**Teresa:** I am, 'cause of Quip!

**Travis:** 'Cause of Quip, right? Unless you're using Quip, put your hands down, 'cause no you're not. You're a liar. I'm sorry I have to be so brutally honest, but you're a liar. Go get Quip. I love it. Um, and it's sleek, it's like, compact, it's easy to use, it's amazing.

**Teresa:** Easy to travel with.

**Travis:** Easy to travel with, and it runs off of one battery for three months. So you don't have to worry about plugging it in or charging it or anything like that. And Quip starts at just \$25, and you'll get your first refill free at [GetQuip.com/Shmanners](http://GetQuip.com/Shmanners). This is a simple way to support our show and start brushing better, but you have to go to [GetQuip.com/Shmanners](http://GetQuip.com/Shmanners). [clears throat] 'Scuse me. To get your first refill free.

Go right now to [GetQuip.com/Shmanners](http://GetQuip.com/Shmanners).

**Teresa:** We have a jumbotron this week!

**Travis:** Ooh!

**Teresa:** It is, "Listen to the podcast, 'How You Doing?' wherever you prefer. Listen and learn more at the website, PodFriend.pizza. That's PodFriend.pizza. Making time for loved ones is hard enough. But when they live far away it can feel impossible. Laura and Colin overcome that distance with a simple question – how you doing? Through the magic of podcasting, Laura and Colin must make time for each other, sitting down and catching up with funny, heartwarming conversations on games, cars, cooking, and more. In How You Doing... 'How You Doin'?'..." [laughs] "The pod friends try sincerely to stay friends, inviting anyone to listen, and they do the same for the people they love."

**Travis:** That's nice. Go check that out.

**Teresa:** And I said 'How You Doin', but it does have a G at the end.

**Travis:** Oh, okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

[music plays]

**Janet:** We are so thrilled at your interest in attending Hieronymous Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy! Wigenstaff's beautiful campus boasts state of the art facilities and instructors with real world experience. We are also proud to say that our alumni have gone on to be professional heroes and villains in the most renowned kingdoms in the world!

But of course... you are not applying to the main school, are you? You're applying for our Sidekick and Henchperson Annex. You will still benefit from

the school's amazing campus, and you'll have a lifetime of steady employment. Of course... there's no guarantee how long that lifetime will be.

**Travis:** Join the McElroys as they return to Dungeons & Dragons with The Adventure Zone: Graduation. Every other Thursday on Maximum Fun, or wherever podcasts are found.

[ocean sounds]

**Speaker 1:** Ahh, there's nothing quite like sailing the calm, international waters on my ship, the SS Biopic.

[ship horns]

**Speaker 2:** Avast, it's actually pronounced bio-pick!

**Speaker 1:** No, you dingus! It's biopic!

**Speaker 2:** Who the hell says that? It's bio-pick.

**Speaker 1:** It's the words for biography and picture!

**Speaker 2:** If you—

[ship horn]

**Dave:** Alright, that is enough! Ahoy, I'm Dave Holmes. I'm the host of the newly rebooted podcast, formerly known as International Waters. Designed to resolve petty, but persistent arguments like this. How? By pitting two teams of opinionated comedians against each other with trivia and improv games, of course! Winner takes home the right to be right.

**Speaker 1:** What podcast be this?

**Dave:** It's called Troubled Waters, where we disagree to disagree!

**Travis:** Okay, now it's time for question—hi, Lilly!

**Teresa:** Lilly, get down please.

**Travis:** Lilly's up in the microphone. Here's special guest, Lilly the dog.

**Teresa:** No.

**Travis:** Okay. So, Liz wants to know, "What do you do if you hate a book everyone else loves?"

**Teresa:** Okay. Um, one of the don'ts, I would say, of book club, is starting out with the question, "So, who liked the book?"

**Travis:** Yeah, don't do that.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Right? Um, here's the thing. If you hated the book, one, I commend you for finishing it, because I don't finish books I hate. Um, but you need to have... instead of just the visceral reaction of, "Ugh, I hate this," try and look in yourself and find out why.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Right? Because that's what this discussion is about. I think that it's just fine that you hated the book, if you can talk about, "Well, I don't like the author's tone, I didn't like uh, the way the characters behaved, they didn't feel realistic to me, I thought that the writing was too simple, the syntax was off," like, any of that kind of stuff.

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** Figure out why, and that is a great discussion.

**Travis:** Yes. And that's the thing – discussion is the key there, right? Because if everybody rolled up to book club and was like, "We all liked it!" That's not a good discussion, right?

**Teresa:** Right.

**Travis:** The thing is, especially reading and consuming a book is such a subjective experience, right? I have very strong negative feelings about Wuthering Heights, but that said, I understand that there may be people out there who really like Wuthering Heights. You can't say this book is—unless it's like, missing pages and doesn't have an ending, like, it's hard to say a book is objectively bad, right?

**Teresa:** The publisher cut it off in the middle of the last chapter. [laughs]

**Travis:** Right. There are people who like things that you don't like, and there are people who don't like things that you like, and that's what part of the discussion is. So I would advise in any conversation about a subjective kind of material, that it is not about winning. It's not about being right. It's not about proving the other person wrong, or convincing someone that they are wrong.

It's about, uh, the opportunity to discuss different points of view about it that may change the way you look at it, but it may not. But mostly, remember that the experience is to get together with people and have a social experience with them with a specific goal, right?

**Teresa:** That being said, um, there will always be that one person in book club who tries to convince everyone else that this was the best book ever, or this was the worst book ever. And my advice, if you are that person, I would say, state your opinions, and then, allow everyone else to say their opinions.

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Don't steamroll.

**Travis:** Think of it like you're going to a buffet, right? Get yours, and then let other people eat before you go back for seconds.

**Teresa:** [laughs] Um, and if you encounter said steamroller person, um, try not to get emotional about it, and um, sometimes, people just need to let it



out. They just need to talk, and once they're done talking, you can thank them for their presentation, and then continue.

**Travis:** And y'know, I think if you have someone in the club who routinely like, is y'know, talking over other people or not letting them have their opinions or whatever, I think you should uh... someone should have a private conversation with them, not during the book club meeting, but like, y'know, off mic to say like, "Hey, we love having you in the club, but we want to make you aware that sometimes you have a tendency to kind of talk over people, or like, shut them down, and it kind of hurts the discussion, and so, we'd love it if you could like, work on letting other people have their chance to talk."

Right? Because the thing is, most people want to do a good job. Most people want to be liked, right?

**Teresa:** Absolutely.

**Travis:** And so, a lot of the times, people just—I will say this, as someone who over-talks, and like, y'know, is very bold and brassy in my opinions. I'm not doing it to be rude. I'm not aware I'm doing it most of the time.

**Teresa:** Exactly. Which is why we have our own little signals, where I can... I can be very gentle and discreet in letting Travis know that, hey, you are awesome, but please let other people talk. [laughs]

**Travis:** Uh, this is from Chris. "What about paper versus audio? Does it matter?"

**Teresa:** We discussed this a little bit. As long as you can pay attention and form your own opinions, for a discussion, no. I don't think it matters at all.

**Travis:** It's just a different way to experience the thing, y'know? Like, I think if that's how you prefer to consume it... I would say like, at some point, you may want to say like, "Now, I listened to it, so I may have had a different experience than you." Right?

**Teresa:** Sure, sure.

**Travis:** If someone's like, "I found the imagery to be encapsulating!" You can be like, "Well, I listened to it, so maybe I experienced it different from you, but I didn't get that." I think it's just more a piece of information.

Along those same lines, Meredith asks, "If you haven't finished a book for whatever reason, is it still okay to attend the specific book club, or should you sit it out?" I think that if you go, you can say like, "Now, I didn't finish it, but..." And you should also not expect them to like, talk around spoilers, or not discuss the ending of the book.

**Teresa:** Exactly. I mean, if you're with a group of friends, and they don't want to spoil it for you, that's fantastic. Um, but the honesty is the best policy there. And I think that... please be specific about where you stopped. Like, a specific plot point, instead of just saying, "Well, I didn't finish it." Um, because hopefully, you can participate in the discussion after. I mean—before that point, and then, maybe afterwards, it will help you to get the motivation to finish the book.

**Travis:** Right. Or I mean, if all else fails, and it's about wanting to be able to contribute to the conversation, you can always look up a synopsis. Uh, and y'know, find out what happens after you stop reading it. I—I come at this from a different perspective, where like, I don't really worry about things getting spoiled for me.

**Teresa:** I don't either. I can watch the same movie like, 20 times. It's fine.

**Travis:** Right. And like, if I see people discussing a thing that I haven't seen yet, mostly it just makes me interested to go watch it. Like, I love listening to like, movie podcasts about movies I haven't seen to see if it sounds interesting to me, and then I go watch it. I have strong feelings about twists versus quality, which I don't need to discuss here.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** So like, I am of the opinion of like, if I was going to discuss, I would look it up so that I would have all the context in place.

**Teresa:** Um, one of the things that can help with this is, if it's more of a democratic societal book club, set a reading schedule that's appropriate for everyone. Right? Um, so like, if I were to join a book club at this moment in time, I would need at least a month to get through a book. There is no way I could do a book a week. But, there was a time in my life where I could've done a book a week. I'm a very fast reader, and I could get through it for sure.

Um, so, set a realistic reading schedule. And if you find that you are consistently not able to finish the book in time for your book club, speak up and say that. Say, maybe we need to meet... maybe these meetings need to be chapters one through 25 instead of one through 50. Y'know, things like that, so that you can enjoy your book club and not feel bad.

**Travis:** Uh, Nick asks, "Do you think book clubs could be online, or should they happen in person?"

**Teresa:** Actually, there is a new trend of Instagram influencers starting their very own book clubs, and using like, Instagram live as kind of like, the hub of their book clubs.

**Travis:** I think in this—with uh, y'know, Discord and Slack and even like, Facebook groups, and everything. The opportunities to communicate, and communicate in rapid, real time, I think that the idea of having to sit in the same room for it to be effective is silly. Right? Of like, like I said, Lin started the Shakespeare thing. It was a Facebook group, right? Like, I think if it gives you the social opportunity to discuss and an excuse to read a book you want to read, go for it.

**Teresa:** Perfect.

**Travis:** I think, especially, um, if it's something where you want to start a very specific book club, where it's like, we're going to read this book series, or this author, or this genre, even. And it's like, y'know, you may not have

friends in your, y'know, 20 mile radius who are actually interested in that thing. But, there's probably plenty of people on the internet who would love to discuss that thing with you. I think it's absolutely fine.

Okay, one last question. This is from Laney. "How could someone politely pitch a book to read for a book club without it turning into a detailed PowerPoint presentation?"

**Teresa:** Um, well, I think that you know your book club the best, right? And if they need a detailed PowerPoint presentation, don't be afraid to make one. [laughs]

**Travis:** See, this is the thing where I'm always a big fan of like, structured process. Right? This is what we talk about on Shmanners all the time, right? Having like, someone kind of process in place makes it easier, makes it more mannerly, makes it like—because you know exactly what to do so no one's worried about pitfalls. So like, hopefully, your book club has some process in place to nominate and decide on books.

So like, the idea of like, if you say, "Here's this book, here's why I think we should do it, I can give you more information if you'd like, but this is the kind of book that it is, and I think we would be interested in it." And then, if they don't want to do it, they don't want to do it.

**Teresa:** A good way of tempering this is to put it in your book club kind of rules out there that, whoever is hosting the next session picks the book.

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Um, so that you don't have to put together any kind of presentation. You can just say, uh, book club's at my house next month on the 25<sup>th</sup>, and uh, we are reading *Pride and Prejudice*. Y'know?

**Travis:** Right. The only thing I would say to help with the successful book club—

**Teresa:** I would watch that movie again.

**Travis:** Okay.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** To help with like a successful book club is, give people the opportunity to say no to a book for very good reasons, like, "I'm uncomfortable reading a book about blank." Or, uh, "There are issues dealt within this book that I think would make me not like, uncomfortable, like, I don't like this book, but I would find difficult to read." Like, that kind of thing. I think it's a perfectly reasonable, y'know, explanation of why you wouldn't want to do a book.

So I would say like, say you meet once a month, right? Maybe propose books the week before you meet, right? So then, you can decide on the book when you meet, and give people time to like, learn a little bit about it.

**Teresa:** Oh, that's a great idea! Kind of like a preview. Like, we're gonna discuss the book from last month, but while everybody is coming to my house next week, think about these books, and we'll vote.

**Travis:** Right. And that way, like, you're not just springing it on—that way, you're not having to give them the information. They can look up what they want to know about it themselves, right?

**Teresa:** That's a great idea. Um, before we go, I would like to say that, um, one piece of advice for your discussion, along with, "Did everybody like the book or not like the book?" Uh, which you shouldn't do. Is... try not to disparage the characters in the book without really like, reading the room first, right?

Because especially if you're reading older novels, or ones that deal with like, touchy or triggering subjects like anxiety, or depression, or abuse, or things like that, you never know what people in the room have gone through themselves. And to say something like, "Well, I'd never put up with someone who treats me like that!"

**Travis:** Right.

**Teresa:** Maybe somebody did, y'know? You don't want to say those kind of things if you don't know the other people's story.

**Travis:** What I would say to that point, if that is something you want to discuss, I would say, rather than looking at it from the psychology of the character, say something like, "I don't think the author justifies this character's behavior." Right?

**Teresa:** Okay. Yeah, that's a good idea.

**Travis:** Because then it's about the construction of the book and what is actually in the book, rather than anybody inferring an experience about like, "Well, I think anyone who would do that is..." Instead, saying like, "I felt like the author never really made it clear why this character is behaving this way."

**Teresa:** And the "I" statements are good here as well, like you said, about like, "I didn't think so," or, "I don't understand why," or, "The author didn't spell out to me why the choices were made the way they were."

**Travis:** Yes.

**Teresa:** Y'know, just, if you're not quite sure about other people's circumstances, you want to make sure that you don't shut someone out, just because they may have made a similar choice that you don't agree with.

**Travis:** And the fact is, they might be able to offer insight into that moment or character that you wouldn't be expecting, because they might have an experience that's different from your own, which is another great reason to discuss things with people so you can learn. So you can learn about other people's experiences.

**Teresa:** The opposite side of this coin is, you shouldn't imply that someone can't understand what another person—what the character has gone through because of their life experiences, right? So, if the book is about a character

in a different social class, or a character from a different country, and you don't think... and your opinion of the other people in the book club is that they can't possibly understand, don't assume that. Maybe they can understand.

Sympathy and empathy are very closely related, and you just can't assume that kind of stuff about people. It's a great subject of discussion, but don't... don't judge your book club mates just because you have a preconceived notion about them.

**Travis:** It's almost like you can't judge a book by its cover.

**Teresa:** [gasps] What?

**Travis:** Alright, folks, that's gonna do it for us.

**Teresa:** [laughs]

**Travis:** Thank you so much. If you have ideas for topics that you would like to hear us discuss, you can email us, [ShmannersCast@gmail.com](mailto:ShmannersCast@gmail.com). When we pick a topic, we will put up a post about it on Twitter, so that—

**Teresa:** I mean, unless it's like a biography or something.

**Travis:** Yes. So that we can do questions and stuff. Um, we—I'm gonna be honest with y'all. We'll probably be late again for this week, because I leave on Tuesday to go on tour. Um, so, next episode will probably be up late again. Apologies. So, so sorry. Things are just a little chaotic right now.

**Teresa:** So thank you for your patience.

**Travis:** Yes. And thank you to Brent "Brental Floss" Black for our theme song. It absolutely rules, and you can get it as a ringtone wherever those are found. Um, let's see, what else?

**Teresa:** Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That is @ShmannersCast. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the

cover picture of the fan run Facebook group, Shmanners Fanners, which uh, if you are interested in giving and getting excellent advice from other fans, that's where you should go.

Thank you to Alex, our research assistant. She, especially for this one, was able to really... [laughs] Really uh, shrink down my search criteria to something that was Google-able. [laughs]

**Travis:** Yeah.

**Teresa:** 'Cause I was like, "I want to talk about feminism and books and— and different book clubs and what they were about," and she's like, "Okay, I gotchu." She's great. Thank you so much, Alex.

**Travis:** And that's gonna do it for us. So join us again next week.

**Teresa:** No RSVP required.

**Travis:** You've been listening to Shmanners.

**Teresa:** Manners, Shmanners. Get it?

[theme music plays]

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