

## Imagine Interview with Gretchen Farah

1. When did you first start the book club? In this last year, how has it been with gaining new members and adapting virtually?

We started up in January 2020, so we had only been going for two months before the shut-down. By the spring, we started doing Zoom. In the summer, we met on Imagine's outdoor deck, socially distanced. (The group is on Zoom now but plans to enjoy some outdoor meetings again soon!) It's always been about five in the group, but we're open to new people, and you don't have to be a member of Imagine.

2. So that's a book a month; you all have read a lot of books! What has been your favorite book the group has read so far, or genre?

We read *The Dutch House* by Ann Patchett, and that has gotten many, many awards and has been on lots of top ten lists. That was maybe our second book, after *Educated* (which I could not put down).

I like fiction. I like British murder mysteries, and I like family dramas, family dynamics.

3. How do you select the book for each month's meeting? I've noticed that books for the club are critically acclaimed and culturally relevant titles that people want to talk about.

I usually select something I've already read, but I want people to know, I always say every month, "You are very welcome to suggest a book. It doesn't have to come from me." The nice thing about the Imagine book club is that we are still very new, and we're very casual and we're very welcoming to people.

I read about books a lot, and if I see an article about a book that we've read, I will forward that to the members, and we might talk about that during our book club a little bit. For example, the cover artwork of *The Dutch House* was so compelling that it is an actual work of art now that has been highly acclaimed. Also, *Long Bright River* was one of Obama's favorites for last year. I will send those things to our group and say that we pick winners!

4. The welcome, close-knit group makes a big difference. Reading can be an escape, but also a way to educate ourselves and think about our place in the world. How do you approach reading in your daily life? And in structuring book discussions for the club?

I have my book of books, and I've written down every single book I've read since 1994 with the title, author, and how many stars.

For the book club, I do include a discussion template of questions as a jumping-off point, but we often start out with the first question and then completely let the conversation move into other areas.

5. The book of books is the perfect thing for the head of a book club to do! Do some of your readers find the books each month at the local library?

You can do a request at the Ann Arbor public library, send it in and do contactless pick-up. Our public library has been rated in the top ten public libraries for many years. We have an outstanding library with an incredible selection of books for kids, too.

6. What do you hope the group takes away from a meeting? Is there a favorite moment from a discussion?

We all get along very nicely. The conversations are very good and are quite animated. That's what we take away from it—a sense of camaraderie and friendship, definitely.

One thing that I was happy about is that the women of the group are voracious readers. They had never read Maeve Benchy, who is one of my all-time favorites. In our group, for some reason, we love to read about Ireland, England, France. It's interesting to read books that are set in those locations. So, I was talking about Maeve Benchy, and these members who read all the time had never read her, and I've read all of hers. I chose *Tara Road*, and they loved it, and one of our members started reading all of Benchy's works. I love to introduce new authors to people; I really enjoy that.