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Social Networking for Book Lovers: Quick Reference

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My Discoveries

shelfari

Don't call it a comeback. Reading has been around for years.

A study published recently by the National Endowment of the Arts indicates an increase in the number of people who have read at least one piece of literature in the last 12 months. This is the first time we have seen an uptick in this activity (which includes all novels, poems, short stories, or plays) since 1982.

The numbers are still relatively low (50.2 percent), but it's good to see any reversal. One possible theory for this is that there are many new online tools for turning reading into a social activity. Let's take a look at what's out there, shall we?



Gathering spaces

The web has served as a virtual water cooler for reading fans since its earliest days. Whether it's a Usenet mailing list, a Facebook fan community, or an online message board, there are plenty of resources for discussing many of your favorite books. Many even have an in-person component, where those engaging in the online discussion come together to continue the talk face-to-face.

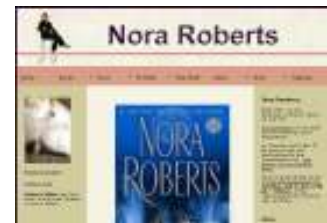
Meetup.com serves as a clearinghouse for many of these gatherings, and they make it rather easy to find groups close to you.



1. Go to Meetup.com and click on "Find a Meetup Group."
2. Enter your interests (try "book club" or "reading"), and your ZIP code. Choose the furthest distance you are willing to travel. Listing a 5 mile radius will cover most of the surrounding area.
3. Check the results list to see if the group is still active. Clues include an up-to-date events calendar, an active message board, or a nicely designed Meetup page.
4. Create a Meetup account, and join a group?
5. If you don't see a group you like, why not try creating one?

Author Pages give writers a way to connect with fans. Some are more interactive than others. Some pages merely exist for the author to have an "official site" on the Web, offering a list of titles and (frequently) an encouragement to buy the new book. Others tend to be a little more fan-friendly. Janet Evanovich (www.evanovich.com) has a Q-and-A section, where readers are invited to submit questions. Nora Roberts is an active presence on her website's message board, www.noraroberts.com.

Other authors have devoted their energies to Facebook fan pages (such as Charlene Harris or Patrick Rothfuss), or Twitter profiles (like Neil Gaiman or Harlan Coben).



Strategies for finding an author's online presence:

1. Start with a search for the author on Google. Try adding the word "official" if you get a lot of useless results.
2. Try a URL hack such as "www.authorsname.com." You can also do this on Facebook (www.facebook.com/authorsname) or on Twitter (www.twitter.com/authorsname). This may not always work, so you can always try searching Facebook or Twitter directly.

Things to consider:

1. Not every author has a web page. (Don't expect to find an official J.D. Salinger web page anytime soon.) Sometimes the best you'll be able to do is get information from the publisher.
2. Not every author's web page (or Facebook profile) has a discussion-based community.
3. Not every author spends a lot of time on their message board or Facebook page. Some of these can be quite time-consuming, and I'm sure you'd prefer they spend more time working on their next book.



Social Reading Sites

Individual author web pages, message boards, or Facebook pages are all well and good. But most of us prefer to talk about reading *writ large*, sharing our enthusiasm for a much larger variety of authors and books. In addition to allowing you to meet new people and discuss your favorite books, these sites also serve as a repository for everything you've ever read, and host a number of tools for listing, reviewing, sorting, and rating your reading history.

Common Features

Here are some of the key terms you should recognize.

Shelf: All the books you've added to the system.

Collection: Think of a collection as a shelf within your main shelf. If you'd like to make subdivisions for your books (mysteries, for example), you can create a group and add books this way.

Tags: Tags operate much like subject headings in a library catalog, but with more flexibility. You can add tags (on most sites) to your books, and organize your collection using these keywords.

Tag Cloud: A visual representation of all the tags in your collection. Tags that are used more frequently will appear larger in the cloud.

Rating: Oddly enough, all of these sites mentioned use the 5-star system to help you designate how much you liked a book. Make your rating, and check the average score to see how it fared with everyone else.

Reviews: Your chance to expound on your feelings toward the book in much greater detail.

Comments: Responses from other users regarding other reviews or ratings. The primary space for discussion.

Friends: Other people you have linked with on the network. You and your friends will be kept up-to-date on one another's reading activity.

Group: A gathering around a specific type of book (such as romance novels), or an author. Allows people who aren't directly connected (friends) an opportunity to converse on common ground. Features a message board and other opportunities for conversation.

Widget: a graphic "bug" that can be exported to your personal website or Facebook page. Can be configured to update automatically as you add to your collection.

Each social reading site has its own set of fans and detractors. Take a look at each one and see which one you prefer.



www.shelfari.com

The prom queen of the bunch. Shelfari stakes its claim on its large, dynamic images and ease of use. Perfect for those who want their virtual bookshelf to look like a physical bookshelf.



www.librarything.com

Class valedictorian, LibraryThing offers an almost limitless variety of ways to examine data about your reading habits. Designed by librarians, it's perfect for the statheads among us.



www.goodreads.com

Chair of the social committee, Goodreads goes out of its way to offer many ways to connect with other readers. If you're looking to talk about books with a variety of people, this is the one for you.



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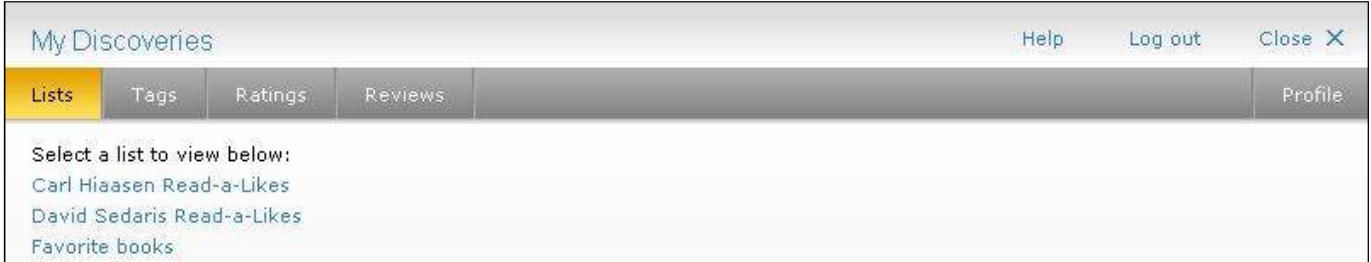
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Social Reading at Your Library

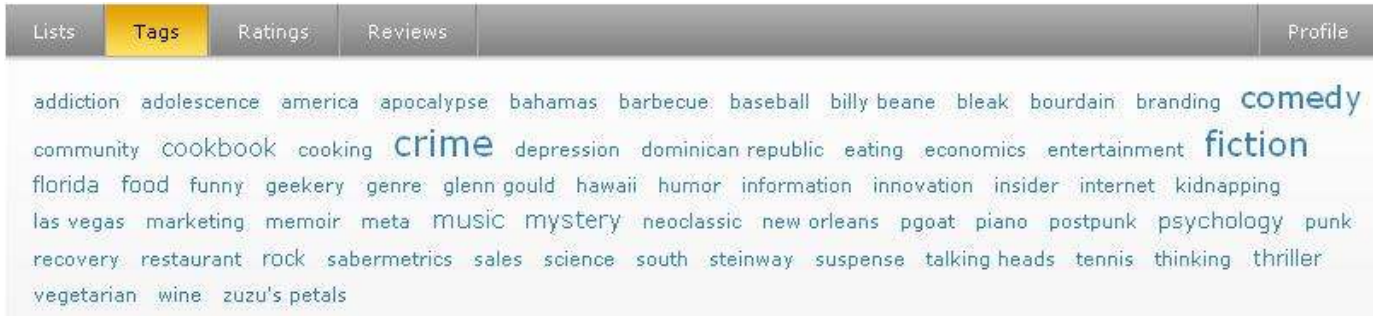
You can use many of the same social reading features right in our library catalog. By clicking on the "My Discoveries" button on the top right corner, you can create your own reading lists, add tags, leave ratings, and write reviews for other My Discoveries users! The system uses the tags and user reviews from LibraryThing, so there's already a base level of content delivered directly into our catalog.

Visit aquabrowser.skokiepubliclibrary.info and click on My Discoveries to create a login and password. All you need is a valid email address.

Your profile has four main features:



Lists function like collections on the other sites. Create sets of books, or make a list of books you'd like to read someday. Choose "Make this List Public" to share your collection with other My Discoveries users.



Tags are simple keywords that you can enter to denote the most memorable features of the books you add to your collection. In the tag cloud, the tags you use most often show up in a larger font.



Ratings use the 5-star system to help you measure what books you like the most (and which ones you hated). You can then compare your ratings with other users.



Reviews allow you to unlock your inner Janet Maslin. Share your feelings about your collection with other My Discoveries users, and browse the collection to see what reviews others have left.

Social Networking for Booklovers—Worksheet

1. List 5 of your favorite authors here.
Try to find the website, Facebook page, or Twitter profile for at least 2.

Author Name

Author Website

A. _____	A. _____
B. _____	B. _____
C. _____	C. _____
D. _____	D. _____
E. _____	E. _____

- 2, Did any of them have a message board or a forum for conversation? Which ones?
-

3. Choose a social reading site.

Circle one: AquaBrowser.skoki.library.info GoodReads.com LibraryThing.com Shelfari.com
(My Discoveries)

If you need to remember your username and password, write it down here:

Username: _____

Password: _____

4. Add a few titles to your collection. Try rating the item, adding a few tags, or creating a collection.
5. Search for a few of your friends. If you can't find any, you can send me (Toby Greenwalt) an invite, or send invites to other friends or family members.

Have Fun!

