

SPN Book Group

The SPN Book Group is one of the lesser known SPN regular events. It is a casual book group run by the SPN (currently led by Zahra Massoud, SPN BAME Rep), and is open to all staff and PhD students at the University of Edinburgh who are LGBTQ+ or allies. We meet from 5:45pm – 7pm on the third Thursday of each month during the academic year, and have recently expanded to also run through the summer months. Ordinarily, we would meet in a pub or café to chat about the month's book, although in the past year we've transitioned to online meetings.

The books we read are selected at random from member's suggestions. We have no restrictions on the length, genre, style or format of the book – in the past we've read novels, poetry, short stories, and even self-help books. Any book is fair game, though of course books with LGBTQIA+ characters or themes are always welcome! By not limiting ourselves to particular categories and genres, we have had lively discussions about books we've loved, books we've hated, and books we never would have picked up of our own accord!

For our last meeting, we read *The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta. This heart-warming verse novel tells the coming-of-age story of Michael, a young, gay, mixed-race boy, as he explores the different facets of his identity. Our discussion centred on our understanding of his experiences, in relation to our own and to other forms of LGBTQ+-focused media, as well as on the format of the book as a verse novel interspersed with stand-alone poems. At this meeting, we also selected our books for the summer months. Members suggested as many books as they like, which were added to a list from which 3 were selected using a random number generator (in person, we'd pull names from a hat!). The full list is available on our SharePoint site, and members will be encouraged to submit titles for another selection in September.

To ensure accessibility, we encourage anyone who's interested to attend meetings, regardless of how much (or little) of the book you've read. You're also welcome to join just for a coffee and chat about books if you've not read the book at all. However, we do have a policy of not being a spoiler-free zone, to allow anyone who has finished the book to share their full thoughts. We also share content warnings for each book on our SPN Book Group SharePoint site, for anyone who would prefer to check these before reading or attending meetings.

Our next meeting will be held on July 15th, from 5:45pm – 7pm, to discuss *Gideon the Ninth* by Tamsyn Muir. Due to relaxing COVID-19 government restrictions, we now have the option to meet in person again. However, to ensure the comfort and safety of members, we currently select our preferences of whether to meet in person or online using a private poll around 1 week before the meeting, and venue is chosen by majority vote.

To join the SPN Book Group, and access the SharePoint with further information on venues, reading lists and content warnings, please email Zahra (she/her) at zahra.massoud@ed.ac.uk.