How to Host the Party

The plan, in one page

A December book club party is not a meeting with snacks. It is a party where the books are the games. Pick three activities from this kit - the book swap, the white elephant, blind date with a book, Secret Santa, or the year-in-review sheet - but pick only one exchange game: the book swap or the white elephant, not both. Run them in the order below. The full evening in the timetable runs two hours from arrival to the vote.

The evening, hour by hour

Time	What happens	You need
First 30 min	Arrive, hot cocoa, browse the swap table	Cocoa station, swap table
Next 30 min	The exchange game you picked + blind date with a book	Wrapped books, game rules
Next 30 min	Secret Santa + year-in-review sheet	Gifts, review sheets
Last 30 min	Movie night vote + next year's first pick	Two films, ballot

Send the invitations two weeks ahead, and tell every guest to bring two books: one wrapped book they have read and loved, for the exchange game, and a separate Secret Santa gift book for their drawn reader. The whole party runs on that instruction: one wrapped book for the game, plus one gift book for Secret Santa. The same one wrapped book serves whichever exchange game you pick - the swap or the white elephant. If a guest forgets, keep two spare wrapped books by the door - the host's insurance policy.

The Book Swap

Everyone leaves with a book

The swap is the simplest game in the kit and the one guests remember. Every guest brings one wrapped book they have read and loved. Unwrap it onto the table, spine out, when you arrive. Each guest picks one book, in the order they arrived. That is the whole game - and it works because the rule is one book in, one book out.

Swap rules

- Bring a book you loved, not a book you could not finish. The swap runs on enthusiasm.
- Bring the book wrapped. Unwrap it onto the table, spine out, when you arrive - a wrapped book starts a mystery, and unwrapping it starts the conversation.
- Write one line inside the front cover: why you loved it, and who you think should read it next.
- No buying a new book for the swap. The point is a book that has already been read and loved.
- If two guests want the same book, the one who arrived first takes it. The other takes the next book on their list.

Host tip: put a small card beside each book with the giver's name on it. A swap where nobody knows who brought what is a lucky dip; a swap where every book has a giver is a conversation.

10 Discussion Prompts

For the party, and for January

These prompts are for the quiet moments - between games, over cocoa, and at the January meeting when the film is watched. They are about the club's year, not about one book.

1. Which book this year changed your mind about a genre you thought you disliked?
2. Which book did you finish fastest, and which one took you the longest - and why?
3. Which character from this year's reading would you invite to this party?
4. Which book did the club disagree about most, and who was right?
5. Which book would you give to a stranger, and which would you keep for yourself?
6. What was the best first line the club read this year?
7. Which book made you laugh out loud, and where were you when it happened?
8. Which book's ending do you still argue about?
9. If the club could read one book again for the first time, which one?
10. What should the club read first in 2027 - and who should choose it?