



It Happened the 3rd Book Club Meeting — Session Report

Date	Saturday, 25th April 2026
Venue	Kibanga Books
Book of the Month	<i>The Seldom Vow by Joseph Munene</i>
Session	3rd Book Club Meeting

1. Overview

The Authors & Writers Club Kenya held its 3rd Book Club Meeting at Kibanga Books. The session centred on *The Seldom Vow* by Kenyan author Joseph Munene, in what proved to be one of the most immersive conversations the club has had.

The session was structured to give both readers and non-readers a complete picture of the book before opening up into broader discussion on themes, craft, and what the novel offers writers looking to learn from a published Kenyan voice. Members also shared practical insights on book visibility strategies in the Kenyan market.

BOOK OF THE MONTH
APRIL 2026

From the Author of *The Resting Wind*

THE SOLEMN VOW
 Joseph Munene

The Solemn Vow - (Contemporary Novel)

Join us for book club discussion to read, learn & grow as a writer.
RSVP Required

#SelfPublishedSuccess #ReadwithUs #LearnFromPublishedAuthors

THE SOLEMN VOW
 THE AUTHORS & WRITERS CLUB KENYA

In "The Solemn Vow," Nancy, a brilliant firstborn daughter, navigates the crushing weight of family duty and societal expectations in modern Kenya. As a dedicated college student and aspiring actress, Nancy's world is upended when her father's successful business empire is sabotaged and destroyed by fire, plunging her family into financial turmoil. Driven by an instinctive sense of responsibility, Nancy becomes the family's silent anchor, sacrificing her own needs and resources to support her mother's failing health and her three brothers' educations. Even after her marriage to Hillary, a supportive man who encourages her to find her own voice, Nancy remains trapped by "old demands," as her family continues to view her unending selflessness as a right rather than a gift. Stretched to her breaking point, Nancy eventually realizes that boundaries are not a betrayal of love, but a necessity for survival. In a powerful climax of self-reclamation, she makes a "Solemn Pledge" to honour her own existence. She makes a binding vow to love her family without losing her identity.

The Solemn Vow - (Contemporary Novel)

#SelfPublishedSuccess #ReadwithUs #LearnFromPublishedAuthors

A notable outcome from this session: the author made **36 sales in total** from this group.

2. About the Book: The Seldom Vow

The Story

The Seldom Vow is a work of literary fiction set in contemporary Kenya. The club began by walking through the plot together, ensuring that every member, whether they had read the book or not, could follow the conversation and contribute meaningfully.

The novel is grounded in the lives of its characters, their relationships, and the pressures they navigate. Members took time to understand each character and what drives them —their decisions, their silences, their contradictions. The discussion moved carefully through the plot, unpacking not just what happens, but why it matters.

Key Themes

The themes in The Seldom Vow are ones that hit close to home for many readers. The club examined each of them with care:

- **The weight of being firstborn:** In many Kenyan families, the firstborn carries a particular kind of burden. Expectation, responsibility, and the silent assumption that they will hold things together. The Seldom Vow explores this dynamic with honesty, showing how that weight shapes a person's choices and sense of self.
- **Family expectation vs. identity:** The tension between who your family needs you to be and who you are is one of the book's central threads. Characters in the novel struggle to honour their families while also asserting their own identities, a tension that members found deeply resonant.
- **Love under pressure:** The novel does not present love as a refuge. Instead, it shows love as something that gets tested, by circumstance, by expectation, by silence. The club examined how the characters love each other and what that love costs them.
- **Resilience that quietly costs you everything:** Perhaps the most powerful theme the group discussed was resilience, not the triumphant kind, but the quiet, relentless kind that nobody cheers for. The kind that means showing up every day even when you are running on empty. The novel captures this with a sincerity that many members found moving.



3. Writing Style & Craft

One of the highlights of the session was the discussion on Joseph Munene's writing style: warm, sincere, and grounded in the rhythms of everyday Kenyan life.

Members noted how the novel earns its emotional moments not through dramatic declaration, but through the accumulation of specific, familiar detail: dinner table tensions, kitchen conversations, quiet prayers, school fees issues, the mango tree in the yard. These are the textures of ordinary Kenyan life, and Munene renders them with precision.

At its best, the writing captures emotion through specificity rather than declaration, a craft distinction that the group spent meaningful time on, particularly for members working on their own manuscripts.



L-R: Wanjiku Gitagia, Author of *Deportee* and Doreen Khamala, Author/Book Coach/Marketer & Convenor of Authors & Writers Club.

A note from the Convenor, Doreen Khamala:

"When it comes to the inner world of a book, the craft decisions, the silences between the lines, the way a scene lands, you simply have to be there as a writer. That understanding lives in the room."

To our readers: you are always welcome at this book club. We need your voice. Writers spend so much time inside the work that we can lose sight of how it actually lands with the people it was written for. Readers bring us back to that. Come join us for our next read, your perspective as the audience is not just welcome, it is essential."

4. Member Discussion: Book Visibility in Kenya For a Published Author

Following the literary discussion, members shared practical insights on how to get books in front of more readers in Kenya. The conversation was grounded and generative.

Strategies That Members Are Exploring

- **Corporate libraries:** A member raised the opportunity of placing books in corporate libraries, companies with wellness programmes, reading initiatives, or simply bookshelf spaces in their offices such as Safaricom, Communications Authority of Kenya, some colleges and Universities. These are largely untapped by independent Kenyan authors and represent a reliable purchase channel that does not depend on foot traffic.
- **Book fairs:** Book fairs remain one of the most effective in-person visibility channels for Kenyan authors. They gather a self-selected audience of readers in one place, and the opportunity to sell, sign, and speak in the same moment is difficult to replicate online. Members encouraged each other to identify upcoming fairs and plan for a presence, not just as attendees, but as exhibiting authors or in panels.
- **Restaurant bookshops:** An emerging trend that the group discussed with enthusiasm: books placed in restaurants and cafes as part of the dining experience. Some establishments have begun stocking curated selections of local titles, creating a discovery moment for readers who might not otherwise visit a bookstore. For authors, this is both a sales channel and a brand-building opportunity.
- **Merchandise that makes a book a whole experience:** Members discussed the idea of pairing books with branded merchandise: bookmarks, tote bags, journals, or themed items that connect to the story. When a book becomes an experience rather than just a product, it travels differently. Gifting becomes easier. Word of mouth becomes more visual. The book takes up space in the reader's life beyond the final page.
- **Bookstores already have your audience.** They have the foot traffic, the shelves, and the readers walking through their doors every day. The real question is: are you showing up as a partner, or simply dropping off copies and waiting for a sales update?

The group was candid. Some bookstore are actively looking at authors too. You take your books into the store, ask them to make content for you, they do, tag/collaborate with you, but you just don't reciprocate by accepting the collaborations, commenting, reposting, you just share. They do that once, twice and then stop all in all. You are not trying to help also. Not letting them tap into your audience too.

Worst, there's no trace of you being a writer. No posts about your book, your process, your reading life, it raises a question: how can a bookstore invest in promoting you when you haven't invested in promoting yourself?

Members also noted the pattern of authors who call bookstores asking "*how many books have been sold?*" without having done anything to drive those sales themselves.

The shift the group encouraged is this: go to the bookstore not just to stock your book, but to create a presence.

- Ask where your books can be placed for maximum visibility.
 - Ask what you can do to support the partnership.
 - Then go further, propose something. Suggest a reading, a signing, a themed event involving your book or simply join their book club or what event they always have.
- **Learning from other authors on social media. Observe, adapt, and open doors:** One of the most practical and underused strategies the group discussed is simply paying attention to what other authors are doing. Not to copy them, but to learn from them.

- Your voice, your story, your genre, your audience, those are yours. But when you see a Kenyan author writing in a similar space doing something that's working, that's information you can use. Watch how they show up. Notice what they post. Pay attention to how they talk about their books, their process, their readers. Let that give you ideas about what you could try.
 - Then go one step further: reach out. If an author like you has landed a podcast interview, a magazine feature, or a panel invitation you've been hoping for, don't just admire it from a distance. Ask how they got there. Was it a direct pitch? A referral? A relationship built over time? Could you do the same?
 - The literary community in Kenya is small enough that doors open through people. If a fellow author already has a relationship with a podcast host, a magazine editor, or an event organiser, that connection doesn't have to stop with them. Ask for an introduction. Ask if they can recommend you for the next slot. Ask them to put in a word. The worst that can happen is a no, and even that costs you nothing. But more often than not, authors who have walked a path are willing to help others find it too.
- **Your inner circle is your launchpad, not your landing spot.**

One member shared something simple and effective: during the launch period, draft a message to every direct contact in your phone. A personal ask. Let them know the book is coming, and ask them for a pre-order. These are the people who already trust you, they don't need to be convinced of who you are.

But, and the group was clear on this, once the launch energy settles, shift your focus entirely. Your inner circle will always show up for you. What your book needs next is strangers. People who have no reason to be kind, no loyalty to protect, and no relationship to maintain. Because the moment a reader who doesn't know you picks up your book and chooses to finish it, that is the beginning of a real readership. And if they love it, what they say about it will carry weight that no friend's praise ever could.

- **Reviews: seek them, don't wait for them.**

The group agreed on this directly, authors need to actively reach out to readers and ask for reviews. Not hint at it. Not hope for it. Ask for it.

Here is why it matters: a review is not just feedback. It is social proof. It is the voice of someone who has nothing to gain telling the next reader that this book is worth their time. In a world where readers are overwhelmed with options, a genuine review is one of the few things that cuts through the noise. It builds trust faster than any marketing copy you will ever write about your own book.

Reviews also create a trail. On platforms like Goodreads, Google, or even a simple WhatsApp testimonial shared publicly, each review makes your book easier to discover, easier to recommend, and easier for a stranger to say yes to. Bookstores notice. Podcast hosts notice. Event organisers notice. A book with visible reader responses tells a story before the first page is even opened.

So reach out. Follow up with readers you know have finished the book. Ask them directly. Make it easy, send them the link, suggest a platform, even offer a prompt if they are unsure what to write.

Practically: commit to at least one of these strategies and show up consistently. See what works and come share with us.

Beyond that, consider having your own website, either a professional profile showcasing your work and bio as a writer, or an e-commerce site where readers can buy your books directly, ideally with a .KE domain to anchor your Kenyan identity online, mine is www.doreenkhmalabooks.ke. *This website thing is something I can help you set up. Let's talk — WhatsApp 0715 969 201.*



5. Closing Remarks

The session ran over time, an indication of how much there is to discuss when the right people gather to talk about writing, craft, and what it means to be a published Kenyan author. Readers included.

Members were reminded that the next featured book will be announced soon. Everyone, writers and readers alike, is encouraged to actively engage with the selected book ahead of the session. Rather than leaving a book unread, opening even a few chapters, up to Chapter 6 for instance, can provide enough grounding to offer meaningful feedback and to contribute to richer, more natural discussions. Writers bring the craft lens. Readers bring the experience of the page. Both matter.

The Authors & Writers Club is not just a space to read books. It is a space to break down craft, how the story is told, what works, what writers can take back to their manuscripts, and what it looks like to build a life as a published Kenyan author. Readers are part of that conversation too. Their instincts, reactions, and honest responses to a story are exactly what writers need to hear. If you know someone who belongs in this room, writer or reader, bring them in.

Next meeting date: To be confirmed