

Book Club for Girls

Background

In September 2006, I began hosting a book club for girls. The club started with four members, ages eight to ten, and has now grown to six members, ages nine to eleven. I have two main objectives for the group:

- To support the girls in forming a life-long relationship with books as a source of ideas, comfort, and inspiration.
- To support the girls in developing and expressing their unique voice in the world, whether that is in writing or other forms of expression.

In order to address both objectives, our discussions include a range of questions from emotional response to literary analysis.

Resources

Choosing books, planning sessions, and facilitating the discussions have been great learning experiences for me. These are some of the resources I have found most helpful:

- Great Books for Girls, by Kathleen O'Dean
- Some of My Best Friends Are Books, by Judith Wynn Halstead
- The Mother-Daughter Book Club, by Shireen Dodson
- Deconstructing Penguins, by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone
- Discovering Voice: Voice Lessons for Middle and High School, by Nancy Dean
- Several books for young writers by Ralph Fletcher

Planning Tips

The club is always evolving to incorporate what we are learning along the way. These are a few of the things I've learned about planning a book club:

- The books you would choose to read on your own may not necessarily be the best ones for group discussion. Consider the discussion opportunities when selecting titles.
- Only select titles for one-half of the year at a time and encourage the members of the club to participate in selecting titles. I chose titles for the full year in our first year and spent a lot of time making changes as the year progressed.
- Don't overlook learning more about the authors and their other books. We discovered how valuable this could be in our first year. When we found out that the author of Understood Betsy was a Montessori educator, it helped to illuminate parts of the story that we might otherwise have overlooked. Learning that Andrew Clements was a school teacher with a great love for language enriched our appreciation of the messages in his deceptively simple school stories.

Our Club's Book Selections by Session

YEAR ONE

1. The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon, by Jacqueline Davies (picture book)
Into the Woods: John James Audubon Lives His Dream, by Robert Burleigh (picture book)
2. Understood Betsy, by Dorothy Canfield Fisher
3. Molly's Pilgrim, by Barbara Cohen
The Keeping Quilt, by Patricia Polacco (picture book)
4. The Year of Miss Agnes, by Kirkpatrick Hill
5. The Trouble with Jenny's Ear, by Oliver Butterworth
6. Rachel: The Story of Rachel Carson, by Amy Ehrlich and Wendell Minor (picture book)
Rachel Carson: Preserving a Sense of Wonder, by Thomas Locker and Joseph Bruchac (picture book)
7. Courage of Sarah Noble, by Alice Dagliesh
The Bears on Hemlock Mountain, by Alice Dagliesh
8. Ben and Me, by Robert Lawson

YEAR TWO

1. No Talking, by Andrew Clements
2. Half and Half, by Lensey Namioko
3. The Secret School, by Avi
4. Ballet Shoes, by Noel Streatfeild