

How to start a Mother - Daughter Book Club

How to start a Mother-Daughter (or any parent and child) Book Club

1) Choose the participants carefully:

- A total of 10 participants works well (that's five parents and five kids) as it's enough people to generate a varied discussion, but most living rooms can still accommodate a group that size.
- We have found that it works best when the kids all attend school together and are in the same grade. This means that they are connected outside of the book club although they don't need to all be "best friends." Now that our older girls are in high school, they aren't all at the same school, but they have such a long-standing connection, that this hasn't been an issue.
- Remember that it is important that you have other mothers who are equally committed. The success of the club will depend on the moms to fully participate so select people who you know will value the experience. When I started both clubs, I included a couple of moms that I knew really well and a few that I barely knew and over time we have all developed close friendships and socialize outside of the book clubs.

2) Let the kids choose the books:

- The kids have to feel that they are reading what they are interested in. If you try to make it into a literature class, you will lose their interest. Remember that the point is to generate discussion – not to get them to read through the classics. Some of our best discussions have come from books like "Twilight" and "Percy Jackson." As parents, we also realized that it was helpful to understand what our kids were reading and be able to discuss it with them. Once you're well established, you might be able to slip in an adult pick or two.
- Not everyone is going to finish every book – and that's ok! We don't ever leave out or shame anyone who hasn't finished a book. Again, the point is to generate discussion. We normally ask their permission to explain the plot of the book so they can still contribute to the discussion.

3) Keep it fun:

- You want to keep the kids interested in attending and not make it feel like an obligation. We always include a fun activity and snacks to keep it exciting.

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4) Find a format that works for you:

- With some trial and error, we found this basic format worked best for us:
 - i. We rotate houses and the host daughter picks the book and plans the snack and activity.
 - ii. We start with about 20 minutes of free time for the kids and moms to catch up and get settled.
 - iii. I prepare 10 questions in advance (some examples are below) and hand them out so that everyone has a question to read out. If no one in the group feels comfortable creating the questions, you could each bring a question or search the internet to see if other groups have posted any (if it's a well-known book, you will probably find discussion questions from the publishing company or from teachers).
 - iv. We always start with everyone commenting on whether or not they liked the book and why/why not.
 - v. We take turns reading out the prepared questions. These often lead to long discussions and follow-up questions. When we feel that we've exhausted that line of discussion, we read out another question.
 - vi. Once the questions are done, we take a break and have snacks. The snacks are themed to the book whenever possible.
 - vii. We then move on to an activity that is themed to the book (some examples below).
 - viii. Usually for the last ½ hour the kids go off and hang out without the moms and this gives us a chance to discuss how things are going with our girls, share parenting tips and just generally check in with each other.
 - ix. Before we leave, the next host shares their book choice and we schedule the next meeting. We generally meet every 4-6 weeks.

5) Be flexible:

- When our older girls were in grade 8, we realized that their different tastes and heavy schedules made reading an extra novel a chore that most didn't want. We switched things up and got together for another activity instead. We've gone to movies, out for dinner or just gotten everyone together for a visit.
- The older girls have recently asked to try cooking as they are all really interested in learning more life skills. We have come up with a format that has the host parent teach the girls a recipe with them assisting in the kitchen while the other mothers visit (or drop by later). Once the food is prepared, we share the meal together.

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Book Examples:

Twilight

When we read Twilight we taped big sheets of paper on the wall and listed all the things that the book had in common with the Disney movie "The Little Mermaid." Once we were finished, the girls understood that the idea of instant, perfect love that makes you willing to give up all that you are and all that you have is a common literary theme. While they hadn't been willing to debate the idea as it applied to Twilight, when it was applied to a children's cartoon it was easier for them to step back and be more objective about the concepts.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

We read the first book of the Harry Potter series and our host had a huge collection of memorabilia that she set up like a museum exhibit. For our activity we split into pairs (one mom and one daughter who weren't related) and wrote out our own potion complete with ingredients and mixing instructions (stir counter-clockwise with a dragon bone at midnight...) that we then shared with the group. We also had fun tasting Bertie Botts Every Flavour Beans and guessing which flavour we'd been given! These are the questions that we asked at that meeting:

- 1) Would you bring a Cat, Toad, Owl or Rat as your pet to school?
- 2) After explaining how Harry got his scar, Hagrid says to Harry, "That's why you're famous. You're the boy who lived." Turn to the person next to you and say: "That's why you're famous. You're...."
- 3) Why are the Dursleys so unkind to Harry?
- 4) What would the mirror of Arasat (that shows you what you most desire) show you?
- 5) Friends sometimes say unkind things to each other. Ron says a number of unkind things to Hermione. Why? Do you think he made it up to her later in the story?
- 6) Harry, Ron and Hermione spend most of the book suspecting Snape of being the one trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone. Why did they suspect him? Was it fair that they did?
- 7) What would you name your 3-headed dog?
- 8) If Harry had grown up in a happy family with his parents still alive, would he have developed the courage and strength of character required to defeat Voldemort?
- 9) Would you enter the forbidden forest? Would you take Fang?
- 10) Who is going to keep reading the series?

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Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret.

We read this book with both book clubs as it's a great opportunity to discuss all the challenges of puberty in a supportive group. For the activity we decorated pads, tampons and paper bags used for disposal. The moms all shared stories of getting their first periods and shared their experiences of living with the monthly visitor! These are the questions we asked:

- 1) Why does Nancy Wheeler lie about getting her period?
- 2) Everyone is jealous of Laura because she developed early. Why does that make them mean to her?
- 3) This is one of top 100 books most frequently requested by parents to be banned from libraries. Why would parents not want their children reading this book?
- 4) Although she is new to the school, Margaret finds herself in the "popular" group of girls. Is this a good thing for Margaret?
- 5) The girls belong to a club, just like we do with our book club. What are the differences between our club and theirs?
- 6) What exactly is Margaret hoping to find when she goes to the different religious services?
- 7) Margaret finally finds the courage to voice her opinions, even when they are different from her friends. Why is this so hard?
- 8) There are lots of different religions in the world – including many different ones that worship God. Why do you think different people are attracted to different types of churches or temples?
- 9) Do you think it's fair that Margaret's grandparents stopped visiting their daughter when she married someone from a different faith? Why would they be uncomfortable with this?
- 10) Can everyone think of one thing that is good about developing early and one thing that is hard?