

Over the past several years, educational researchers have emphasized the importance of non-fiction reading for kids. Children who read non-fiction books develop background knowledge about the world, gain sophisticated vocabulary words, learn how to interpret and synthesize information from charts and graphs, and develop research skills that are crucial for future learning.

Yet, my two kids, and a lot of the kids I taught in New York public schools, read fiction almost exclusively. I get it. Fiction is magical. Even when a story is completely realistic, stepping into the world of the author's imagination feels like being put under a wonderful spell. Fiction can move us, wake us up, and inspire us.

But, non-fiction can do those things, too. When we open a non-fiction book, we learn about the amazing, miraculous, and, sometimes, unbelievable world around us. We might learn about the huge variety of animals that inhabit our planet, or the other planets that share our solar system. We might learn about clouds, weather patterns, plants, or our history. We can find the answers to our questions, or more questions to ask, or both. We can pursue a passion, or discover one.

In the case of this month's book, the autobiography *My Life with the Chimpanzees*, we learn about the life of another person - a person not unlike ourselves, though she might have been born far from our own homes - and the choices that she made.

Jane Goodall's passion for observing, living with, teaching about, and protecting wildlife is just as inspiring as any fiction story. And her story is real. We can look to her life, her choices, and her activism as a template for our own. This is as good a time as any to ask yourself, *What am I curious about?* Start there, like Jane in the chicken coop, and see where it takes you.

In the following pages, you'll find suggestions for how your fourth meeting could go.

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As parents and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up. Snacks don't have to be fancy at all, it can be as simple as a picnic blanket in the backyard, or sitting around the coffee table eating popcorn and lemonade.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Start with a check-in about leadership goals. Did anyone try being honest about her feelings, even when it was uncomfortable? Or, did anyone try to deal with a conflict by listening, like Astrid from *Roller Girl*? Give a few minutes to share experiences.

If there's time, pairs might ask each other questions such as: "Which types of books do you tend to read most often? (Fiction or non-fiction? Any particular topic?) What draws you to those books?" Give five minutes for discussion. (These could be parent-daughter pairs, or you could decide to mix up pairs.) Then, give 5-10 minutes for sharing each other's answers.

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so**Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions are a good springboard to book talk because they allow readers to bring up any part of the book that made an impression, confused, delighted, or inspired them. If you started with an open-ended question in the first meeting, you might ask the same question this time or try a different one from the list below. Any question that gets parents and daughters sharing is a good question.

- What was your favorite part of the book? If you have the book with you, read a paragraph or two of your favorite part aloud. Why was that particular part so powerful or memorable?
- Which part of the book felt important or gave you a Big Idea?

- Was any part of the book confusing? Was your confusion cleared up by the end of the book or not?
- How is the main character like you, and how is she different? Would you have handled the situations in the story differently than she did?
- What did the main character learn in this story, if anything?

Questions About My Life with the Chimpanzees

These questions about *My Life with the Chimpanzees* can help you launch your book talk. Some groups might have time to get to all of these questions, but many groups might pick one or two questions and spend the whole meeting discussing those. Feel free to write your own discussion questions.

- Did you learn anything about Jane Goodall's life that surprised you? If so, what was it?
- How did Jane's family feel about her choice to live with chimpanzees in Africa? Which parts of the book make you think that?
- Talk about a time when you saw something happen in nature that gave you a sense of amazement and wonder (like when Jane observed the chicken laying an egg).
- What are some words you would use to describe Jane Goodall?
- How did Jane go from being a child who was interested in animals to a one of the world's leading experts on animal behavior and a global activist for the environment? What choices did she make along the way?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Pair off and talk about your leadership goals for this month. Jane Goodall speaks up for environmental concerns all around the world, but she started with one subject - animals - that piqued her curiosity. What subject piques your curiosity? What are some first steps you could take to learn more about that subject? Use your book club to brainstorm ideas.

Parents should set goals, too! Report back to the club next month.

Closing, 5 minutes

Before everyone goes off their separate ways, make sure you've chosen a date for your March meeting. Happy reading!

Further Reading!

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more like it, here are some suggestions. If there are other books you would like to recommend, we'd love to hear them! Please share them on our Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook page, so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

Hidden Figures by Margot Lee Shetterly - The young readers' edition of this book is suitable for fourth grade and above. The story of four young African-American women who worked at NASA in the 1940s and made crucial contribution to the space program is likely to capture all readers' imaginations, especially those young girls who are interested in the space exploration themselves.

I Am Malala by Malala Yousafzai - This autobiography comes in a young reader's edition that is suitable for children in upper grades and older. Like Jane Goodall's, Malala's life is defined by curiosity, facing challenges, and willingness to speak out against injustice.

Rad American Women A-Z: Rebels, Trailblazers, and Visionaries who Shaped Our History . . . and Our Future! by Katie Schatz, illustrated by Miriam Klein Stahl - Twenty-six one-page biographies of female activists, politicians, writers, and more who made their mark on the world with their courageous words and actions. The women are bold, and so are the awesome black-and-white portraits that accompany each page. This book is highly recommended for your family's bookshelf. Parents might have to help younger readers with some of the advanced vocabulary, but it will be accessible for most kids in 3rd grade and up.