

***One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia**

At the heart of *One Crazy Summer* is Delphine, the eldest of three sisters who travel from Brooklyn to Oakland to visit the mother that abandoned them years ago. They hardly remember her, and don't know what to expect. When they arrive, they are disappointed to find that their mother Cecile doesn't seem to want them around at all.

This book is full of rich characters. As readers (and especially as parents) our hearts ache for the three sisters, denied the motherly affection that most children take for granted. However, Cecile shares the story of the grief and disappointments she experienced in her own childhood, and we see a different, more sympathetic, side of her. In her own way, she loves her children and tries to teach them what she can. I hope that this story gives your book club much to discuss.

Successful Book Club Tips:

Most book clubs will meet in members' homes, alternating each month. When you meet, the whole group will have already read the book. Parents and daughters might read together or independently; either one is totally fine. It's a good idea to have copies of the book on hand for reference if possible.

Parent-daughter pairs should take turns leading the meetings. This will involve choosing discussion questions to start off the meeting, drawing out quieter voices, and keeping an eye on the time. Don't worry too much if some participants are hesitant to share during this first meeting. Some people need one or two meetings to warm up.

On the following pages, you will find some suggestions for how your book club meeting might go. Feel free to use whichever of these questions and tips works for you, and substitute as you wish. The best book discussions develop organically as people listen closely and respond to each other.

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As parents and girls arrive, think about allowing 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.

Since this is the first meeting of the year, gather everyone before so you can go over ground rules. It's helpful if the club members are all on the same page about expectations, particularly when it comes to privacy. Our **Book Club Mad Libs** can help with this, and will also help you give your club a fun name.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Parents and daughters might ask each other a question, such as:

“What was the best book you’ve read recently and why?”

Give five minutes for pairs discussion. Then, give 5-10 minutes for parents and girls to introduce each other and share a bit about each other's answers. It might sound something like,

“This is my mom. Her name is Shannon. The best book she’s read recently is *The Hired Girl* because she loved the main character.”

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. Your club might even pick one open-ended question, and make it a tradition to start with that question at every meeting.

Remember, readers are always allowed to “pass” if they’d rather not share their thoughts. Book club is meant to be fun, not stressful. In my experience, people will share in their own time.

Here are some useful open-ended questions:

- 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?

Successful Book Club Tip: If you are the pair that is leading the meeting this month, take a look at the questions in advance. If you decide to start with an open-ended question, I recommend that you tell all the pairs the question a few days in advance. For those of us that clam up in a group, having time to think about our idea and plan how we'll express ourselves takes away some of the pressure of public speaking.

Questions About One Crazy Summer:

These questions about *One Crazy Summer* might help you begin 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.**

- How do Delphine and her sisters feel when they're on their way to see their mother? Do you think they're feeling one emotion or many? What makes you think that? How would you feel in their situation?
- What is the relationship between Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern like? Can you relate to it?

- What are some of the main difference between the girls' life in Brooklyn and Cecile's life in Oakland?
- When Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern first go to the People's Center for breakfast, are the Black Panthers what they expected? What does Delphine mean when she thinks, "beating eggs never makes the evening news?"
- Does being in Oakland make Delphine question what she knows? Does being there change her? If so, how does she change?
- What do you think Cecile means when she says, "It wouldn't kill you to be selfish?"
- What do the sisters hope to get from their mother? Do they get it, or do they get something else? Do they feel satisfied at the end of the story?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

One of the most important scenes in the story takes place at the Black Panthers rally where Delphine and her sisters recite one of their mother's poems in front of a huge crowd. Ask the group to think about public speaking. **Is it easy or challenging for you? Do you get a lot of practice at it?** For this purpose, we can define public speaking as speaking in front of any kind of group, even if it's a small group of classmates.

Participants can talk to each other in pairs or as a whole group. Think about setting a goal for the next month. For instance, you might try to find three opportunities to practice. This goes for parents, 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 November meeting. Happy reading!