

If one has never been cared for, how does one learn how to accept care? How does one learn to feel worthy of love, and to fight for the right to happiness?

Our children, fortunately, won't likely know how it feels to be neglected, unloved, and unwanted. But in *The War that Saved My Life*, we read about a girl named Ada who was all of those things. She thought she deserved only the little she had, and nothing more. When London children are sent to the country to escape bombings, Ada finds herself with Susan Smith, a woman who, for very different reasons, is also living a life of isolation. With Susan, Ada learns so many things. How to ride a pony, how to knit, how to read. How to be happy. How to fight for herself. Her life becomes more than she ever dared to hope.

Ada had let her mother define her with awful words like "cripple," "idiot," and "rubbish." Susan is the first person to see Ada as capable. It's hard for Ada to leave behind her belief that she's unworthy and stupid. Little by little, she begins to hope that things could be different. Perhaps her mother won't have to be ashamed. Ada wants to be good enough, but learns that nothing is going to be good enough for her hard, resentful parent. If she is going to have any joy in her life, she has to make it for herself.

We cannot choose how we are born, or to whom, or whether our country fights in a war. But we get to decide who we are in the face of those circumstances. We can choose to fight for our happiness and the happiness of those whom we love. We can choose bravery.

I hope that you enjoy this beautiful story, and that you find it as moving as I did. In the following pages, you'll find suggestions for how your March 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 practice a leadership skill since the last meeting? Did anyone try noticing and speaking up for injustice in your community?

If there's time, pairs might ask each other questions, such as: **"If you could choose to live in any historical period, which would you choose, and why?"** 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 *The War that Saved My Life***

These questions about *The War that Saved My Life* 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.

- What motivates Ada to start learning to walk?
- Ada doesn't go far to get to Kent ("the country") - just a train ride from London - yet she doesn't understand how anything works, the language, or what is expected of her. Why is she so confused?
- What does the pony, Butter, mean to Ada?
- Why doesn't Ada want to admit that she enjoys her life with Susan?
- After Ada's Christmas episode, Susan insists that it's not bad to feel sad, angry, and frightened.
- Ada knows she's lying; she believes these are bad ways to be. What do you think?
- After her birthday party, Ada says, "I had so much. I felt so sad." Why do you think she feels that way? Have you ever felt similarly?
- What does Ada want at the beginning of the story? Does she get what she wanted?
- At the end, Susan tells Ada there are different kinds of truths. It is true that Ada belongs to her mother, but also true that Ada belongs with Susan. Do you agree? What do you think about the idea of different truths?

**Leadership Goals, 15 minutes**

Pair off and talk about your leadership goals for this month. Ada realizes that her mother will never care for her like she ought to, and will never give her the life she needs and deserves. So, she decides to ask for the life and family she wants. Do you ask for what you need? Or, like Susan, do you give others support to ask for what they need? Can you think of a time in your life when you did one of those things?

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 April meeting (the last one of the year!). 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.

*The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman - Beetle has never belonged to anyone, and she certainly doesn't belong to the grouchy midwife who finds her and agrees to take her in as an assistant. Yet, slowly, Beetle, who renames herself Alyce, begins to feel that she has some worth, until she makes a mistake and runs away. To go back to her village would be unthinkable, Alyce doesn't have that kind of courage... or does she?

*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor - This historical novel set in the Great Depression, tells the story of nine year-old Cassie Logan and her family, who rely on their love for each other to withstand racism and prejudice in Mississippi.