

Welcome to the 2017-2018 year of Girls Leadership Book Club! In this first meeting, your group will get to know each other (if you don't already), you'll pick a group name, and, most importantly, you'll share your thoughts about this month's book, *Awkward*.

As you discuss this book, first with your girl and then with your club, you might find yourself connecting on a personal level with the complexity of middle school relationships, and the way people can surprise us if we give them the opportunity. I hope that your book club is a place where girls and grown-ups, alike, feel comfortable sharing the stories from their own experiences.

Most of our book clubs meet in members' homes, alternating each month. Participants read the book before each meeting. The older girls should be able to manage planning their reading accordingly, but for the first month you'll want to check in and give support as necessary. Girls and grown-ups might read together or independently; either one is totally fine.

At the meeting, it's a good idea to have copies of the book on hand for reference. With middle school girls used to group discussions, they should be able to facilitate the conversation, including choosing discussion questions to start off the meeting, drawing out quieter voices, and keeping an eye on the time. If book club is a new format for your girls, they might need more support from grown-ups at the start, but the goal is that these conversations are girl-led.

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 your club, 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 grown ups 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. The more the girls can be involved with or even in charge of the meeting, the better. So, when it's your turn to host, remember to include your daughter in decisions about what to serve.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Girls and grown-ups might ask each other a question, such as: **“If you could hang out with one fictional character for the day, who would it be?”** Give five minutes for pairs discussion. Then, give 5-10 minutes for grown-ups 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. She would love to hang out with Wonder Woman.”

It’s fun to see which characters come up more than once, and which ones are new to the group. This is a great time to ask follow-up questions and share even more with each other, just make sure that the group doesn’t spend so long on one answer that they rush through others.

Setting the Ground Rules, 15 minutes

If you are a returning book club, you can revisit the club expectations that you went over last year in the Book Club Mad Libs. Ask if any of the girls remember what the expectations were. This year it might be more important than ever to remind the group (girls *and* grown-ups) of the commitment to being present this time together. It’s definitely not a time to be on the phone.

If your club is new, start by asking everyone: What do you think are some rules we should follow? A variety of ideas might come forward in this conversation. My suggestions are these:

- 1) We share our own experiences, rather than talking about people who aren’t here;
- 2) We keep each other’s confidence, and don’t share with others anything that is said at book club; and
- 3) We stay present and keep our technology put away. If no one comes up with these rules in the course of conversation, a grown-up might want to bring them up.

After you’ve set expectations, ask if the girls want to name the club. Naming the club - much like naming a team - is a way to start to feel like a group of people who have each other’s backs. Here’s one suggestion for developing a club name, but feel free to get creative and use any game or activity you’d like.

The Mixed-Up Name Game: For this game, you'll need pens, paper, and a bowl or bag. Choose two fill-in-the-blank statements from the list below, or make up your own.

- “On my best day, I feel _____”
- “If I could be any animal, I’d be _____”
- “If I dyed my hair, the color I’d choose is _____”
- “If I were a salsa, my spiciness level would be _____”

Write answers to these questions on small pieces of paper, and drop them into the bowl. Girls take turns picking two or three papers out of the bowl and putting them together to form a club name. (For example, the “Spicy Squirrels,” or the “Joyful Silver Bears.”) Let the girls choose or vote on their favorite combination. Your club could also use this activity to get ideas, and then make up a name of your own.

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

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

- Why does Peppi push Jamie, and how does she feel about it afterward? Can you relate to that situation?
- Peppi says the rules for starting at a new school are #1: “Don’t get noticed by the mean kids,” and #2: “Seek out groups with similar interests and join them.” What do you think of those? Would you add or take away any rules? What are the “rules” at your school?
- Maribella seems perfect at first. How does your understanding of her character change after the scene with her dad? And, how does your understanding of Jamie change after Peppi meets his family?

- Why are the art and science clubs such vicious rivals? How do they work past it later in the story, and how do their attitudes about each other change?
- Are there people in your life that you make assumptions about? Have your assumptions about a person ever changed after getting to know her better?
- How does this story relate to empathy and inclusion? How is Peppi inclusive or not?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Are there people in your life - maybe in your neighborhood, or at school - like Jamie in this book - might be feeling lonely, or in need of a friend? Can you show leadership by being inclusive toward that person?

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 make a plan to invite a new person to sit join your game or lunch table. This goes for grown-ups, 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!

Further Reading

All's Faire in Middle School by Victoria Jamieson - This graphic novel from the author of *Rollergirl* is about Impy, a homeschooled girl from a Ren Faire family who decides to go to public school. Swords and dragons are nothing compared to the terrors of middle school drama!

Drama by Raina Telgemeier - Seventh grader Callie is work on sets for her school theater production, getting over one crush while developing another. A great graphic novel from the author of *Smile* and *Sisters*.