

Happy New Year! Here's to reading more wonderful books together in 2018.

In January, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade girls and their grown-ups will read *Habibi*, a story about Liyana, a girl whose family moves from St. Louis to Jerusalem to be near her Pakistani father's family. The language, the food, the rules - all are completely different and new for her, and present a difficult adjustment. But most challenging of all is living with the animosity between the Jews and the Pakistanis in Jerusalem. Senseless violence intrudes directly into Liyana's life when her close friend is shot and her father temporarily sent to jail. However, Liyana is determined to "write a new story," with the help of her friends and family who are trying to stop the cycle of hate.

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 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.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

If your club has been meeting since the fall (or if this is a continuation of previous years), you probably don't have to encourage people to sit next to someone new. At this point, everyone is probably feeling quite comfortable together - the girls rushing into the house to catch up on all the latest, the grown-ups feeling like they know each other well enough to move past small talk.

There might be some clubs that are just starting out, though, and in those cases, depending on how well all the participants know each other, you might encourage people to sit so that they're not in their grown-up/girl pairs.

Once seated, everyone asks her neighbor a discussion question, like: **"When's the last time you went through a change in your life?"**

Give five minutes for pairs discussion. Then, give 5-10 minutes for pairs to share a bit about each other's answers. It might sound something like, "Cassandra's schedule got switched so now she's in a different homeroom from her close friends."

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

These questions about *Habibi* 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.

- What are some of the first details Liyana notices about Jerusalem?
- As she stays in Jerusalem longer, her feelings about it become complicated. What does she like about being there? What does she dislike?
- When does Jerusalem start to feel like home to Liyana? What does she do to feel comfortable there?
- What do you think about Liyana's relationship with Omer? What does she like about him?
- What do you think about Liyana's relationship with Sitti? Even though they can't talk to each other, are they able to communicate?
- Some of the language in the book is quite beautiful. (It's no wonder that Naomi Shihab Nye made a name for herself as a poet!) For example, after Liyana makes a plan to go meet her friend Omer, she says, "the afternoon puffed up lightly, joyously, a delicate pastry, a sweetened shell of hours." Were there any parts of the book that particularly caught your ear because of the way the author uses language?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Participants can talk to each other in pairs or as a whole group about the idea of resilience. We use the term resilience to talk about the super important skill of believing that everything's going to be all right even when life gets hard.

What do you do when life gets hard? What are your resilience strategies? As group members share their resilience strategies, try learning from each other to see if someone else has a strategy that you'd like to try. Like Liyana, maybe you could try keeping your thoughts in a journal.

Closing, 5 minutes

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

Further Reading

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more books 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.

Listening for Lions by Gloria Whelan - Like *Habibi*, this book has beautiful language. It tells the story of a girl, Rachel, forced by tragedy to leave behind her home in Africa and the only life she's ever known. She is sent to England by a duplicitous couple, and has to bide her time before she can unravel the lies they told her and take charge of her life again.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith - Francie Nolan is coming-of-age in Brooklyn in the early 1900s. Passionate, intelligent, and poor, Francie wants more from life than she sees in her family's home. Though determined to earn something better for herself, she cannot fully leave her family behind, or the tender bonds that connect them. As a novel, this one is darn near perfect.