

This month, 4th and 5th grade girls and their grown-ups will read *The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond*. Violet is a bi-racial girl who longs to get to know the side of her family she's never met before.

The older she gets, the more questions Violet has about her dad, who died before she was born. And she wonders why she's never been able to meet her dad's mother. Despite her fear of rejection, Violet reaches out to this mysterious and eclectic woman who is the only link between Violet and the other half of her family history.

Asking these difficult questions upsets the balance in her family, and upsets Violet's mother. But, Violet's need to know more about her history is too strong to be ignored. **Have you ever had a time in your life when you had to have a conversation, even though you knew it would be really hard, maybe even upsetting to people you cared about?**

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, spend some time catching up. The host family might put out snacks and drinks. As a side note, it's nice to include girls in the decisions about what to serve and how to set up for the club meeting.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

This month, you could try a silly ice-breaker, especially if you live in a place that is actually icy. Nothing warms a person up like a good belly laugh! Come up with your own questions, or try some of the following: **Which is better: peanut butter or chocolate? Which is more fun: pools or trampolines? What's the best way to eat an Oreo?**

Give a few minutes for pairs to discuss. If you'd like, give 5-10 minutes for pairs to share a bit about each other's answers.

Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

These questions about *The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond* might help you begin your book talk. Some groups might discuss all of these questions, but many groups will use only one or two questions to get their conversation going. Feel free to write your own discussion questions.

- At the beginning of the book, what are some of the ways that Violet tries to take control of her life (besides wishing)?
- Violet’s mother gets upset when she asks questions about her dad and grandmother. Violet keeps asking, even when the conversation gets very hard. Why do you think she does this? Have you ever had a difficult conversation with someone?
- How do you think Violet feels before meeting her grandmother Roxanne for the first time? How does she feel after that first meeting?
- What do you think Violet means when she says she feels “more me” after meeting the other half of her family?
- Has Violet changed by the end of the book? How?
- What’s the most important thing Violet gets from her visit to Bibi?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

In this month’s book, Violet really wants to meet her grandmother, even though others think it’s a bad idea. Violet knows that this decision might upset her family, and there is a risk that her grandmother will reject her. Violet makes this difficult decision because it’s something she has to do for herself. She has to take control of her life in this important way.

Thinking for yourself and making decisions are leadership qualities. They sounds simple enough, but they are hard to do, especially when friendships might be on the line. Let’s say your friend wants you to do something that doesn’t feel right to you. It could be something small, like wearing your hair in a side ponytail like she does. Or, it could be something bigger, like telling

another kid that they can't play in your group. You might worry that your friend will be angry if you don't go along with her.

Book club members could share when they've been in situations like this, and what they did or wish they did. People could also make a leadership goal related to thinking for themselves, like "I'm going to let others play in my group at recess," or "I'm going to be honest when I disagree with my friend."

This is a good opportunity to use role play. Role play is fun, and a great way to practice difficult conversations in a safe setting. If you'd like to try, follow these steps:

1. Pick one scenario. It's easier if it's based on someone's real experience, so that person can act as "director."
2. Ask the group to brainstorm some different actions the person could take in that scenario.
3. The person who had the experience plays herself and chooses one of the possible actions. A volunteer offers to play the other person in the scenario.
4. You can repeat this with other actions, discussing which actions felt most natural and had the best outcome.

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 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 Group, so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

Half a Chance by Cynthia Lord - Twelve year-old Lucy wants approval from her absent photographer father. So, she decides to take photographs of

life at her family's new lake house. When the camera reveals a difficult truth, Lucy has to decide how far to go to get her dad's attention.

***Pie* by Sarah Weeks** - When Alice's beloved Aunt Polly passes away, she confounds everyone in the town by leaving her famous pie dough recipe to her cat. Alice has to figure out Aunt Polly's mysterious message, while the rest of the town goes pie-crazy preparing for the annual pie-making contest.

***One Crazy Summer* by Rita Williams-Garcia** - Set in the 1960s, three sisters travel from Brooklyn to Berkeley to visit the eccentric mother who abandoned them. On this trip they spend time with the Black Panthers, who teach them about politics and activism, and how to use their voices to make a positive change in the world. They also figure out how to love their mother, even though in many ways she isn't the parent they wish she was.