

For this month's book club, 2nd and 3rd grade girls and their grown-ups will read *The Great Cake Mystery*, about a girl named Precious who uses her detective skills to find the thieves who are stealing sweets from her classmates.

When her classmates are convinced that Poloko stole the sweets, it would be easy for Precious to simply agree with them. After all, there is some evidence that connects Poloko to the theft - his love of sweets and sticky fingers. But, Precious isn't the kind of girl to believe something simply because someone else said it is so. She is a questioner, and she thinks for herself. And these qualities help her clear Poloko's name and find the truth.

Have you ever found yourselves in the position of having to choose between believing what someone else says or thinking for yourself? What did you do?

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. If you're looking for menu ideas, check out the recipe for "Precious' Sponge Cake Worth Stealing" in the back of the book!

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

We suggest these questions about *The Great Cake Mystery* to 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.

- What is one of the first things you noticed about Precious?
- Why does Precious believe Poloko is innocent even though others are convinced he's guilty?
- What is Precious' reaction to those who accuse Poloko? What does her response show about her as a person?
- What do you think would have happened if Precious hadn't gone to the trouble of solving the mystery?
- Do you find it hard to think for yourself when other people have strong opinions? Why or why not?
- What do you think the lion story at the beginning of the book has to do with the rest of the story?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

In this month's book Precious' classmates want her to agree with them that Poloko stole the sweets, and they want her to go and inform the teacher. Precious isn't convinced, though, and she does some investigating to uncover the truth. She thinks for herself, and acts on her own beliefs, not what someone else has told her.

Thinking for yourself sounds simple enough, but it's 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. Another group member offers to play the other person in the scenario.
4. You can repeat these steps with other suggestions, discussing which 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.

The Precious Ramotswe Mysteries for Young Readers by Alexander McCall Smith - In each book, Precious uses her curiosity and cleverness to solve a new mystery.

Rickshaw Girl by Mitali Perkins - Ten year-old Naima wants to earn money for her family, but in Bangladesh girls aren't supposed to have jobs. She decides that if she dresses like a boy she can get around this rule. When her scheme goes awry, Naima takes a great risk to find a solution.

The Anna Hibiscus series by Atinuke - Charming short stories about Anna Hibiscus, who lives in Africa with her large extended family. From helping care for her baby brothers to selling oranges, Anna Hibiscus approaches her life (and her mistakes) with a joyful spirit.