

Welcome to a new year of Girls Leadership Book Club for middle school girls! 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, *Patina*.

For any newcomers (or anyone who'd like a refresher), let's go over the nuts and bolts of book club. Girls might want to read books independently, read to a grown-up, or listen as a grown-up reads the book to her. Any of those options are totally fine, as long as both the grown-up and girl read the book. In my experience, reading together provides the opportunity to discuss as you go, and can help some people feel more prepared for the group discussion. Even if you don't read together, it could be helpful to discuss prior to the book club meeting.

We do our best to select books that are well-written, age-appropriate, and thematically connected to the Girls Leadership mission. However, if the title we've suggested for the month doesn't work for your group for any reason, feel free to change it up. If you'd like ideas for other titles, you could check out the alternate titles we list at the end of every discussion guide, or look through the Girls Leadership book suggestions from other grades or previous years. You could also check websites like A Mighty Girl (amightygirl.com/books), or talk to your local children's librarian.

Most clubs meet in members' homes on a rotating schedule. As much as possible, the girls should be leading the meetings themselves. This will involve choosing discussion questions to start off the meeting, drawing out quieter voices, and keeping an eye on the time. It might be hard to do, but if grown-ups can sit back and not start the conversation, girls might feel like there is space for them to do so. You might even say to them, "We're going to let you girls start the conversation so we get to talk about the things that are important to you." Don't worry if there are pauses in the conversation, or if the conversation doesn't seem to be going anywhere. Better that girls feel ownership over the club. If they are struggling, grown-ups could ask if they want help before coming to the rescue.

As you read this month, you might find yourself thinking back on a time when you, like main character Patina, went through a challenging time. Did you spend time doing something you loved, like Patina does with running track, in order to get through that time? What helps you feel happy, centered, and connected? Do you enjoy sports, too? Is there something you've been wanting to try but haven't yet?

Or did you rely on your support network to get you through? Who are the people who show up for you whenever you need them?

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 everyone arrives, think about allowing some time for snacking and introductions or catching up. Snacks don't have to be fancy, 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 girl in decisions about what to serve.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Grown-ups and girls ask each other, **“What is one place in the world you would love to visit?”** 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 go to Costa Rica because she loves hot weather, beaches, and nature.” 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 you 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** (download on the toolkit page). 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 during 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. I've given you 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

You might decide to start the discussion with every member saying her favorite part of the book before reading discussion questions. 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 come up with your own discussion questions, or bring up any ideas that came up while you were reading. Again, whenever possible the grown-ups should sit back and let girls drive the conversation.

- What kind of person is Patina? What are some clues in the story that tell us who she is?
- Why does Patina love running so much? What is her attitude about winning and losing?
- Why does Coach Whit teach the girls to waltz? What does that have to do with relay races?
- What is the dynamic between Patina and the other kids at her school?
- How does Patina feel when Becca invites her to sit at her lunch table? What does this action tell us about Becca?
- Why do you think Patina gets so upset when Krystal calls Momly her “white mother?”
- How does Patina feel about her family situation at the beginning of the story, and have her feelings changed by the end of the story?

- How have Patina’s feelings about winning and losing changed by the end of the book?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Is there an activity that you’ve been wanting to try but haven’t, yet? How could you take a step toward participation? Could you sign up for a class? Or if there’s already something you do that makes you feel happy - that makes you feel *you* - can you make more time for it? Can you try to do it a little every single day?

Or, if there are people you rely on, can you make sure that you see or talk to those people more often? Make sure you take care of your most important relationships, and also make sure that you spend as much time as you can with the people with whom you can be yourself.

Participants can talk to each other in pairs or as a whole group. Think about setting a goal for the next month. 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

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 other books in the “Track” series by Jason Reynolds: *Ghost*, *Sunny*, and *Lu* - These characters will all be familiar from *Patina*. In this series, each one gets his own book, his own chance to tell a story about life and track.

Breakaway: Beyond the Goal by Alex Morgan - This is the inspiring story of how Alex Morgan became a professional soccer player, Olympic gold medalist, and FIFA World Cup champion.

Forward: My Story (Young Readers' Edition) by Abby Wambach - Abby Wombach tells the story of how she dealt with failure and disappointments to reach the highest heights of professional soccer.

Courage to Soar by Simone Biles - Simone Biles rocketed to stardom as part of the “Fab Five” on the U.S. Women’s Gymnastics Team at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, and left Rio with four gold medals around her neck. In this book, she tells the story of how she got to this point in her career. This story is sure to inspire other young athletes.