

This month, 6th, 7th, & 8th graders and their grown-ups will read the graphic novel *Lumberjanes*. This is a series that I've recommended to many young readers, but the first time it's been an official Book Club selection. I'm beyond excited for anyone who might be coming to this story for the first time. I've reread it over and over, each time chuckling over the wonderful characters, hilarious dialogue, and details in each and every frame.

Jo, April, Mal, Molly, and Ripley are at a camp with the phonetically challenging name: "Miss Qiunzella Thiskwin Penniquil Thistle Crumpet's Camp for ~~Girls~~ Hardcore Lady Types." As Lumberjane scouts, they go on adventures in the woods, earn scouting badges, and always, always, abide by the camp's motto: "Friendship to the Max!" Even when they encounter three-eyed animals, mysterious messages, living statues, and river monsters, these five friends stick together, protecting and supporting each other at every turn. My favorite thing about this series is the unique personalities of the campers. Each contributes something vital to the group, and the girls appreciate and celebrate each other's differences.

As always, it's perfectly fine to swap any title that doesn't work for your club. This is a chance for you to read and discuss books of your choosing with your community. You can check out the alternate titles listed 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* or talk to your local children's librarian.

The theme for Girls Leadership Book Clubs this month is getting outside to enjoy the many benefits of engaging with nature. Consider whether your club could tie this theme into your meeting. Perhaps you could go for a hike together, or hold your meeting in a park. Or, if your club is full of artsy types, maybe you could spend a few minutes making your own scouting badges. The possibilities are endless.

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up. With middle-school girls, try to keep them at the helm of decisions when you can. So, when it's your turn to host the meeting, ask your girl what she'd like to prepare and serve? It can be hard for us grown-ups to relinquish control, but for many kids getting to make decisions can be the difference between being invested in an activity and dragging their feet.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Everyone in the group should pair up with someone new (not the person you came with!). Pairs then ask each other a questions and discuss for five minutes. Then, give 5-10 minutes for pairs to introduce each other and share a bit about each other's answers. Try to ask a question related to this month's theme. You could use one of the following examples, or make up your own:

- Which do you prefer, a city environment or a natural environment? Why?
- In what one place do you feel most at home, and most yourself?
- What kinds of things do you most like to do outdoors?
- How do you feel when you're outdoors?

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 questions, or discuss any ideas that came up while you were reading. Remember, encourage girls to lead the conversation. There is no wrong way to do this.

- The very first page images in this book are of April, wearing a red hooded cloak and standing alone in a scary, dark wood. What feelings or predictions did you have when you saw these images? Why do you think the creators began the book this way?
- Each chapter begins with excerpts from the Lumberjanes Field Manual and ends with a page of captioned “snapshots.” What do these elements add to the story? Why do you think they were included?
- Look at the first page of Chapter Two, “Naval Gauging Badge.” In the middle panel, the five girls are listening to Jen’s boating instructions, and each one is expressing her own feelings about the situation. How do you think each of them is feeling in this moment?
- Throughout the book, how do the creators of the book show the many differences between the girls? You might discuss the way they talk and act, the way they present themselves, even their names. Do any of these characters surprise you? Seem familiar to you?
- How do these five very different girls fit in with each other so well?
- Does one of the girls take on the role of leader? Which examples from the book make you think that?
- How does the counselor Jen feel about the five girls? After she realizes that they were telling the truth about all the monsters, does anything change? How do you think her role in the next book might be different?
- At the end of the book, the many mysteries in this story are left unsolved. (You’ll have to read the rest of the series to see what happens!) Which hints and clues give you ideas about what will happen with the Lumberjanes next?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Let's talk friendship. Middle school can be a tough time for friendships, yet it's also a time when girls most need solid relationships. Think about your current friendships. How could you improve your "friendship health?" Try setting a friendship goal (maybe inspired by the Lumberjanes!). Here are some examples:

- Invite someone new to join you for lunch.
- If your friends tend to spend a lot of time looking at your phones, suggest that you all play a game or go for a walk outside.
- If one of your friends is doing something that bothers you (like telling you what to do), talk to her about it. And if she doesn't get it, spend less time with her and more time with people who appreciate your individuality.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share out loud, going around the circle so everyone has a turn or giving time for anyone who wants to share can do so. If people feel shy about sharing these personal goals, maybe they could jot them down on paper. Whether through writing or out loud, articulating our plans and goals helps us achieve them.

As the Lumberjanes say, "Friendship to the max!"

Closing, 5 minutes

Due to busy schedules, we don't suggest a December book title. Before everyone goes off their separate ways, choose a date for your January 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 rest of the *Lumberjanes* series, of course! Jo, April, Mal, Molly, and Ripley got into lots more tough spots and have many more adventures.

Nimona by Noelle Stevenson - A graphic novel by one of the *Lumberjanes* creators. Nominee is a shape-shifting sidekick... to a villain.

Ms. Marvel by G. Wilson et al - A new superhero rises up: a teenaged Muslim girl from Jersey City. Kamala has to figure out how to balance social life, school, family obligations... oh yeah, and saving the world stuff.