

Almost anyone who has older siblings understands the frustration of being told that you are too little, too young, or too silly to make a contribution. In Anna Meriano's debut novel, Leo is the youngest of five sisters, excluded from helping out at the family bakery. When she discovers that her mother and sisters are witches, she is determined to learn magic on her own and prove herself to her family.

Sneaking around, breaking rules, lying to her family - Leo knows that all of these things are wrong, but she does them anyway because she's desperate to learn about magic. Later, she lies in order to hide her mistakes because she doesn't want to admit that she needs help. As you are reading this story, it could be interesting for you and your girl to examine Leo's choices along the way. When do you think she's doing the right thing? When do you think she should do something different? Is it ever a good thing to try something on your own, even when you're not sure you'll be successful? When is it time to ask for help?

This is a story that's full of magic, traditions, and family - and how all of these are mixed up together in the most delicious ways. If you like this book, check out the fantasy books we recommend at the end of this guide.

Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and catching up.

Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

This month's book is about a character who proves herself in the face of immense challenges. In real life, sometimes challenges come to us (a test at school, for example) but other times we give ourselves challenges in order to grow (like joining an athletic team, or learning a new skill). Pair up or stay in one group to discuss this question:

- *What is something you've never done that you'd like to try?*

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.

- How does Leo feel about her family at the beginning? What does she wish would change?
- Once Leo finds out about the secret that her family has been keeping, how does she feel? How do you think you would feel in that situation?
- How would you describe Leo's personality? (See if you can give examples from the book to show what you mean.)
- All of Leo's female relatives have magical powers. If you could choose one magical power, what would you choose? How do you think that power would help you?
- Why is Leo so determined to do the love spell on Brent? Does she think through the possible consequences?
- When Leo's mom finds out what has happened, she's angry with her daughter but she also apologizes for keeping secrets. What do you think about this? Is it hard for parents to apologize to kids?
- At the end of the book, Leo gets initiated into the family magic. Since the book ended the way she wanted, does that mean that she did everything right? Do you think she should have done anything differently? What if that would mean she wouldn't get initiated?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Leo's family thinks she too young to participate in the family traditions. Has anyone ever underestimated you like that? Tell about a time when you proved you could do something that others didn't think you could. How did it feel to be doubted? How did it feel to prove yourself?

You might also decide to have a conversation about how other people's expectations might affect you. When others doubt you, how do you keep your determination and confidence? What do you think of the following strategies?

- Ignore the comments
- Tell the people to quit expressing their negativity about you
- Give yourself a positive pep talk
- Seek out people who support and encourage you

Are there any other strategies that you would suggest? Feel free to share advice and stories, or maybe talk about which strategy you'll try the next time you encounter someone who doubts your abilities.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share around the circle so everyone has a turn, or give time so anyone who wants to share can do so.

Closing, 5 minutes

Make sure you've chosen a date for your March meeting before parting ways.

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.

Aru Shah and the End of Time by Roshani Chokshi - No matter how many fibs Aru Shah tells, she never seems to fit in with the other kids. When she touches an ancient lamp on a dare, she awakens a demon and freezes her classmates and mother. She must be stronger than she ever to save them, stronger than even her most impressive lies.

The Jumbies by Tracey Baptiste - In this twist on a Haitian folktale, Corinne's father is bewitched by a beautiful and magical woman who is determined to possess the whole island with her evil. Corinne must call on her inner magic - and the help of loyal friends - to stop her.

Love Sugar Magic: A Sprinkle of Spirits by Anna Meriano - Leo makes more magical mischief in the new sequel to *A Dash of Trouble*!

The Runaway Dragon by Kate Coombs - This story has a dragon, a princess, and a prince... but none of them behave the way you might think!

The Serpent's Secret by Sayantani Dasgupta - On Kiran's twelfth birthday, she's attacked by a demon who kidnaps her parents and she teams up to rescue them with a pair of princes from another dimension. And that's only in the first chapter! This action-packed book is about embracing all the parts of yourself, even the parts that happen to be the daughter of the super creepy Serpent King. (This is our middle school selection for this month, but higher 4th/5th grade readers might enjoy it, too.)