

Welcome to a new year of Girls Leadership Girl & Grown-Up Book Club for 2nd and 3rd graders! 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, *El Deafo*.

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](http://amightygirl.com/books)) or talk to your local children's librarian.

Most clubs meet in members' homes on a rotating schedule. Girl-grown-up pairs should take turns leading the meetings. This will involve choosing discussion questions to start off the meeting, drawing out quieter voices, and keeping an eye on the time. Don't worry too much if some participants are hesitant to share during this first meeting. Some people need one or two meetings to warm up.

This month's book selection is the graphic novel *El Deafo* by Cece Bell. There are lots of reasons to love graphic novels for young readers. For one, the comic book style appeals to kids and motivates them to read. Even reluctant readers

often get excited about reading graphic novels. They can serve as a gateway to enthusiasm about reading in general.

In this story, the main character Cece loses her hearing as a very young child, and then often feels isolated from others who don't understand what it is to be deaf. She has a hard time advocating for herself in relationships, and has a hard time speaking up when friends are mean or insensitive. Sometimes, Cece fantasizes about the things she'd like to say, but she usually doesn't feel secure enough to actually say them. In conversation or role play, you and your girl could think about what it would sound like if Cece actually said some of the things she imagines. What might happen next? Discussing scenarios through role play or fictional characters is a great way to launch meaningful conversation about relationships with your girl. Talking about fiction often feels safer than talking about real life.

Girls Leadership co-founder Rachel Simmons says that girls' early friendships are their relationship classroom. As they navigate the waters of friendship, they learn powerful lessons about how they will be treated, how they will treat others, and how they will communicate. The understandings and habits they form can shape their future relationships - platonic, romantic, and professional. You might find yourself reflecting on times in your life when you wish you'd been able to speak up for yourself. Like Cece, all of us will try - and sometimes fail - to ask for what we need. Discussions about this book are a good opportunity to discuss different experiences that you and your girl have had, including mistakes made and lessons learned.

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.

I hope you enjoy this month's book and that your club's conversation takes you in many interesting directions. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook page! [bit.ly/GLbookFB](https://www.facebook.com/GLbookFB)

## Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

Before girls and grown-ups arrive, the hosts might consider whether nametags might be helpful. If any of the people in attendance might not know each other, think about what you can do to put people at ease, and set a warm tone.

Leave a little time for a “soft start” during which people can arrive, snack, and catch up or meet each other.

## Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Girl and grown-up pairs take turns “interviewing” each other with an icebreaker question. You could make up your own icebreaker or use one of our suggestions.

“Talk about a time when you didn’t feel you fit in, and maybe even felt that you were in a ‘bubble of loneliness’ like Cece. How did you deal with it?”

“If you could have any superpower, what would it be? What would your superhero name be?”

After pairs have discussed the question, take a few minutes for anyone who wants to to share their answer with the group. Or, everyone could take a turn introducing their partner to the rest of the group by saying their name and briefly talking about their answer to the icebreaker. (Try to give people a head’s up in advance that they will be asked to remember what their partner said.)

If this is your first meeting together, gather the group for a quick **Book Club Mad Libs** activity (download the Mad Libs on the toolkit page). This will help get club members on the same page about expectations, particularly about privacy, and will also help you give your club a fun name.

## 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 is being in Cece’s first best friend Laura is pushy and sometimes mean. Cece fantasizes about standing up for herself or ending the friendship. But, she doesn’t, because being friends with Laura is better than being in her “bubble of loneliness.” Do you agree with that?
- Cece seems to be looking for the perfect friend. Is there any such thing? What do you think of her friendships with Laura, Ginny, and Martha?
- All through the book, Cece has a hard time expressing herself. By the end of the book, she seems to find her voice. What helped her get past her shyness?
- What are some challenges that being hard of hearing brings up for Cece? Were you surprised by anything you learned about living with hearing impairment?
- Why do you think Cece is so resistant to learning sign language?
- Do you think Cece did the right thing using her sonic ear to help her classmates goof off while the teacher was out of the room? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the idea of warm fuzzies? Why do you think Cece Bell decided to end the story this way?
- In her author’s note, Cece Bell writes that being different turned out to be a strength. She says, “Our differences are our superpowers.” Could you give examples of how a difference could become a superpower?
- How would this book have been different if it had been a traditional narrative, with no pictures?

## Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

Since this month's book is about someone who learns to embrace her uniqueness, take some time at the end of this meeting for book club members to think about what makes each of them amazing and quirky. This could be an informal conversation, or it could be an art activity in which each person draws a picture of themselves that expresses their individuality.

*Note:* None of the parts of this discussion guide are obligatory in any way. Feel free to reshape, abandon, and reimagine as suits your group's needs. If, for example, your group doesn't have the energy for further discussion, you can always skip this last part or suggest it to people as a way of carrying their thinking about leadership into the next weeks. Girls and grown-ups could agree to pay close attention to their quirks and idiosyncrasies in the coming weeks. Then, they could share these in ongoing conversations at home, and/or members could come to the next meeting prepared to share their thoughts.

## Closing, 5 minutes

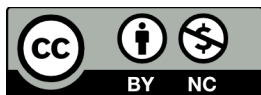
Before everyone goes off their separate ways, make sure you've chosen a date for your November meeting. Happy reading!

## 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** [bit.ly/GLbookFB](https://www.facebook.com/GLbookFB) so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

*The Cardboard Kingdom* by Chad Sell - A group of kids spends their summer using found materials to create an imaginary kingdom filled with magical characters. As they let their imaginations run wild, they use their adventures to process their real life challenges. This graphic novel is full of heart and humor.

*All's Faire in Middle School* by Victoria Jamieson - Impy has spent her life being homeschooled while touring with the Renaissance Faire where her parents work. Now that she's enrolled in a public school, she learns what it really is to do battle with dragons. This is such a fun graphic novel. Also recommended: Jamieson's debut graphic novel Rollergirl.



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