

This month's book is a lyrical and moving story of Caroline, a girl living in a small island community. Abandoned by her mother, disconnected from her father, and bullied by the girls at school, Caroline pushes her hurt deep down, protecting herself by insisting that she doesn't need anyone else.

Everything changes for Caroline when Kalinda joins her class. The two girls develop a loving bond, and together they embark on a mission to find Caroline's mother.

As you read, notice when Caroline stands up for herself, and when she doesn't. What gives her the strength to stand up for and continue to believe in herself when others call her wrong, crazy, or a horrible sinner?

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

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

For today's ice-breaker, we're going to try something different: a group power pose!

Some research suggests that standing in a powerful, expansive pose - some people call this a "superhero pose" - can make a person feel more confident and even help them perform better on a task. The idea became famous when Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard, gave a TED talk on the topic, called "Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are." (Cuddy's TED talk is about

twenty minutes. If the group wants to watch it and discuss together, that could be fun. Otherwise, it could be a fun video for girls and grown-ups to watch on their own later.)

So, let's try it all together and see how we feel. Everyone stand up and get into a power pose. This is a pose that makes you appear bigger and take up more space. Try spreading your feet a little wider than normal and holding your arms out to your side or fists on your hips. Raise your chin. Puff out your chest. Breathe deeply.

Now, hold this pose for two minutes. Afterward, discuss how it felt. Did it make you feel more confident? What if you were trying out for a sports team, or meeting with a teacher to discuss a grade? Do you think this pose would help you feel more prepared to tackle a challenge or an important conversation?

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.

- At the beginning of the book, Carline's mother has already been gone for over a year. How has Caroline's life changed since her mom left?
- Does Caroline's appearance affect the way others see and treat her? Does it affect the way she sees herself?
- How do the teachers and students treat Caroline? What is her response?
- How would you describe Caroline's father? Does their relationship change over the course of the book? As a reader, did your feelings about the father change?

- What is Caroline's first impression of Kalinda? How does life change for Caroline after meeting Kalinda?
- What do you make of Caroline's visions, especially the repeated appearance of the woman in black? How are they important to the story?
- Kalinda says Caroline is like a drum, and Caroline says Kalinda is sad like a violin. If you were a musical instrument what would you be?
- When Caroline confesses her love to Kalinda, Kalinda insists that romantic feelings between women are wrong. But Caroline tells her that they should be able to make up their own minds and trust their feelings, not believe something is wrong just because they're told it's so. Is there anything that you used to believe because someone told you it was true, that you don't believe now that you're older?
- Do you think Caroline did the right thing letting her mother back into her life?

Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

There are times in the story when Caroline must do what she thinks is right, even if others disagree or don't believe her.

This is not an easy thing to do in our lives. Many people feel preoccupied with what others think of them, and might hesitate to act in a way that others might think is weird or wrong. Yet, if we let others' ideas rule our actions, we are abandoning our truest selves.

Talk in pairs or as a group about whether you tend to feel worried about what others think of you, or whether you are comfortable acting however you'd like, no matter how others respond. Or, maybe, it's more complicated than that. Maybe certain people or situations feel safe, like you can be yourself, but in other situations you feel the need to be careful.

Share your experiences. Think about how it has felt to you in the past to be true to yourself. What helped you to do that? In what ways can the members of this group support each other so that everyone has space to be who they are, not who someone else has decided they should be?

Closing, 5 minutes

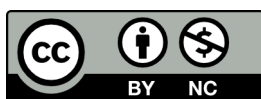
Before everyone goes off their separate ways, make sure you've chosen a date for your April meeting. Happy reading!

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 so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

The Night Diary by Veera Hiranandani - Twelve-year-old Nisha and her family are refugees, traveling by train and foot across Pakistan to a new, safer home. And every night of this dangerous journey, Nisha records her observations and thoughts in letters to her mother, who died when Nisha was very young. These letters reveal Nisha's insights and thoughts about the world, but also her resilience, bravery, and determination to find peace once more.

The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond by Brenda Woods - Violet feels out of place in her mostly white school, and in her mostly white family. Her dad, the one who was brown-skinned like she is, died before she was born. Now that she's eleven, Violet decides she needs to meet her dad's family, so she can finally start to put the puzzle pieces of her life together.



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