

For Parents of Girls Daughters®

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MEDIA

Book club bonding—fun for all ages!

By Cindy Hudson

“This is so cool,” said my 15-year-old daughter, Madeleine, as she donned a plush terry robe and prepared for her first massage. The two of us, along with other members of our mother-daughter book club, were celebrating five years together with a weekend away being pampered at the spa. None of us could have imagined ourselves in this place when we met as a group for the first time.

Back then, all we were trying to do was create a place to foster a love of books and to counteract the “uncool” label that reading got from some of the girls’ fourth-grade classmates. Six moms and six daughters gathered together one school night and decided to make reading cool for us.

Ironically, our first big challenge was setting aside enough meeting time to talk about what we had read. We met over dinner, and the daughters always wanted to play afterward before gathering for a discussion. Meanwhile, we moms lost track of time talking about issues the girls were facing in school, trading names of orthodontists, or sharing ideas for great family vacations. Eventually someone would notice the time and round everyone up for dessert and book talk.

Madeleine and I loved our prep time for meetings. I always read the selection out loud to her, which created a special time for us to connect after a busy day at school and made a great break

before she tackled homework. It was also a calming ritual that we looked forward to at bedtime.

Often Madeleine and I would have our best discussions when just the two of us were driving home from a book club meeting. It seemed easier for her to bring up problems with friends or worries about school when she had first read about fictional characters with similar experiences and heard what her friends and their moms had to say about them.

When the girls entered middle school, they began to select books with female characters around their age who were beginning to date. And our club had a mini-crisis when a book portraying a young girl having sex appeared on our reading list. Many of the moms were afraid that reading books about teenage sex would be seen as an endorsement of behavior we didn’t condone. Instead it gave us the opportunity to talk about emotional and moral issues that would have been difficult for us to bring up without the entrée a book discussion provided.

Around the same time, my younger daughter, Catherine, entered fourth grade and let me know it was time to start a new mother-daughter book club with her. I felt like a seasoned veteran as I planned this new group and began carving out time to read with Catherine on weekday mornings before school. We savored the quiet moments together

before the hectic pace of the day began.

I was surprised at how different the personality of this second book club was. The girls were not only interested in different books, the discussions often went in completely different directions than what I’d expected. Catherine surprised me most of all. Not one to easily share her inner thoughts, she freely talked about how she would react if she were faced with situations in the books. Our car conversations often centered on things I learned while listening to her talk at group meetings, which in turn helped us become closer.

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Catherine will soon start eighth grade. I hope to be a little calmer when the girls in this group begin to select books with grown-up themes, but I've got a feeling that I'll also discover a few new things this time around. As Madeleine's group gets closer to high school graduation, we're talking about ways to continue meeting even after all the girls have gone away to college. Our spa experience and weekend were so much fun, we're now planning something new to celebrate one more year as a group.

Both of our mother-daughter book clubs have become so much more than just a way to make reading cool. The friendships we've made there and the time we spend talking about important things enrich our lives in ways we never could have envisioned five years ago. I look forward to being equally surprised by the new ground we chart in the years to come. ★

Cindy Hudson is a writer who publishes the website MotherDaughterBookClub.com and a companion blog, MotherDaughterBookClub.wordpress.com. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Portland, Oregon.

Dad-daughter clubs

Dads, don't miss the fun and fascinating conversations that a dad-daughter book club promises! It can be as simple as reading a favorite from your daughter's collection and then chatting about what you both liked or didn't like so much. Then repeat on a regular basis. Or you could gather some other dad-daughter duos and get all the benefits of a mom-daughter book club. Get tips on dad-daughter book bonding at the Media area of the *Daughters* Community Forum (www.daughters.com).

Starting your own Mother-Daughter Book Club

1. Who will you invite? You may want to begin with a core group of two or three girls and their moms who each invite two or three others. This eliminates the burden of one person being the only source of connection in the group and allows all participants to help "build" the club. You want to have enough people for a good discussion even if some members can't make it, but not so many that you'll feel overwhelmed at a meeting. Try to make sure all the girls are at a similar reading level.

2. How often will you meet? Every month? Every other month? Will you take breaks during summer and winter vacation? You'll want to schedule enough gatherings to help the group establish and maintain a connection, but not so many that members feel overwhelmed while keeping up with school, work, and other activities. If you meet less often, you may want to schedule "just for fun" get-togethers a few times a year. Seeing a movie or eating at a

restaurant with no reading requirement can take the pressure off while continuing to build relationships among girls and moms in your club.

3. When will you meet? Early evening with dinner? After dinner for dessert? Weekend lunch? A consistent meeting time, like the first Monday or the third Thursday, makes it easier for members to put book club on the calendar.

4. Where will you meet? Decide whether you'd prefer to rotate between homes or find a public meeting place like a community room at the local library.

5. How will you choose books? You may want to cultivate a relationship with a youth librarian at school or a community library, or check out websites like kidsreads.com and teenreads.com for ideas. Ask girls and moms to choose reading selections together for the best success.

—Cindy Hudson

RESOURCES

The Mother-Daughter Book Club: How Ten Busy Mothers and Daughters Came Together to Talk, Laugh, and Learn Through Their Love of Reading, by Shireen Dodson (Revised, Harper, 2007)

The Book Club Kit, by Patti Kelley Criswell (American Girl Publishing, 2007): A starter kit with handbook, question cards, invites, and more.

The Kids' Book Club Book: Reading Ideas, Recipes, Activities, and Smart Tips for Organizing Terrific Kids' Book Clubs, by Judy Gelman and

Vicki Levy Krupp (Tarcher, 2007; www.kidsbookclubbook.com)

Info on starting a club, book suggestions, and more: www.MotherDaughterBookClub.com

Inspiration and inside scoops for girls about girl-celebrating books: www.reader-girlz.com

Resources and parent wisdom about girl-inspiring books: the Media area of the *Daughters* Community Forum (www.daughters.com)—and add your own book club experiences!

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