

By Melissa Taylor

The Story on Parent-Child Book Clubs

Team up with your child for the fun and learning that comes from reading together

Pajama-clad girls surround Annika's chair. "Sit down everybody," Annika shouts over the squealing, "it's time to start." The girls wiggle on the carpet, looking at their seven-year-old friend, Annika, expectantly. The moms sit around the edge of the room in chairs, on the floor and on the fireplace ledge. "So, what part was your favorite?" Annika asks.

The kids in the book club wave their hands in the air like crazed contestants in a game show. This month's book is *Mercy Watson Goes for a Ride* by Kate DiCamillo. Before the discussion, my daughter Annika thought of the questions, wrote them on sticky notes and stuck them on various pages throughout the book. Now Annika calls on each girl, giving everyone a chance to answer or pass.

Parent-child book clubs like Annika's not only encourage important reading habits but also build literacy skills. Literacy Coordinator for the Denver Public Schools, Debbie Milner explains, "Besides building a love of reading, book clubs develop an abundance of literacy skills: the ability to use comprehension strategies; to compare and contrast authors, themes, concepts and ideas; the ability to understand how reading can help you learn about the world; and the ability to learn how to be a good writer from reading good writing."

Even better, parent-child book clubs show children that their parents value reading. "The parent is modeling reading (yippee!) so the child recognizes that the parent values the printed word," says author and parenting expert, Michele Borba, Ed.D.

Teachers and education experts say that



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parents should read to their child daily; parent-child book clubs reinforce daily reading and add an important social component and plenty of learning opportunities.

The Plot

“Our book club started after a couple of moms realized that there were so many girls the same age in our neighborhood,” says Liz Lyons, a Centennial mom in our book club. “Whoever is the host of the month decides on the book selected. [My daughter] Lexi and I read it at nighttime before bed. We usually take turns where Lexi reads one page and then I read a page. Depending on the night, we read anywhere between one and three chapters.”

Tonight, Liz’s daughter, Lexi, sits up on her knees, anxious to answer the next question. “I thought it was funny when the police officer drove by them,” she says. Other girls add “Me, too!” and nod in agreement.

The discussion lingers on the funny parts for several minutes. Cindy Hudson, author of *Book by Book: the Complete Guide to Creating Mother-Daughter Book Clubs*, would approve of our book club structure. In her book, she encourages starting with social time before having the book discussion.

Many clubs also weave tie-in activities into their book club get-togethers. “For *How to Train Your Dragon*, we ate cake in the shape of a Viking helmet and played our version of “Thor’sday Thursday Celebration” from the book,” says Lori Diggory, a mom in a mother-son book club. “We have done some other tie-in activities such as going to see a movie when one of the books we’ve read comes out on film such as *Millions*, *Eragon* and *Freaky Friday*.”

The Characters and Setting

Parent-child book clubs come in all sizes, age ranges and gender groupings. Our book club and most parent-child book clubs share two common characteristics – age and gender grouping. The age grouping helps keep the reading level similar. The gender grouping helps keep the interest of book selections similar.

Last summer, Denverites Heather Benes and her six year old son, Saylor joined a mother-son book club. Like our book club, each boy selected a book on a rotating basis. “The books had to be within certain [early reader] reading levels, usually around one to three,” says Heather. “The parent was responsible for purchasing that book for each child. [At the meeting] the parent would read the book and ask each child to read a page or two aloud in the group. After the book, there was a brief discussion and the parent would provide an activity based on the book.”

Deb Parker of Littleton created her own Mother-Daughter book club because her “daughter is seventeen and an avid reader, so we thought that it would be a good way for us to spend some time together.” Their book club ranges in ages “with the daughters being at least in high

school for comfort in the discussion of the books.”

Not as common are the father-son book clubs. Peter Krupp, husband of Vicki Krupp, the author of *The Kids Book Club Book* and member of a father-son book club recommends, “Keep it as little like school as possible. It has to be relaxed. Pick books that the kids are interested in.” Author and founder of www.guysread.com, Jon Scieszka worries “Because the majority of adults involved in kids’ reading are women, boys might not see reading as a masculine activity.”

However, father-son book clubs do exist. Keith and Kip Clerihue formed their own father-son bedtime book club reading the *Hardy Boys* book series. Currently, they are reading the *Airport Mystery* and plan to investigate the airport and airplanes as a tie-in activity.

Across the city, Doug Ashley, reads the *Hardy Boys* books to his sons as their bedtime ritual. Both families exemplify non-traditional book clubs – a club within a family. Traditional or not, these father-son book clubs promote reading, discussing and literacy skills – and that makes for a fine book club.

The Epilogue

Our *Mercy Watson* discussion ends with a joyful “time for dessert” announcement from Annika. The girls race into the kitchen, grab a cookie and disappear into any room without an adult. Meanwhile, the moms refill wine and munch on snacks. For us, it’s a time to relax and catch up with each other. We look forward to it as much as the kids.

The tired girls beg to stay longer but their mothers insist, “It’s time to go.” The girls share dramatic hugs with parting “good-byes”. “I don’t want to go yet, mom,” say the girls. Mothers remind their daughters to say thank you and push them out the door. I remind Annika to say good-bye to her guests and walk them to the door.

The house empties of noise and friends. Annika and I walk upstairs, ready for another bedtime and a new book to read. ♦

Book Club Resources

- **Books Make Me Happy: My First Reading Log** by Judy Pelikan
- **Book by Book: The Complete Guide to Creating Mother-Daughter Book Clubs** by Cindy Hudson
- **1001 Children’s Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up** by Julia Eccleshare and Quentin Blake
- **The Kids’ Book Club Book** by Judy Gelman and Vicki Levy Krupp



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