Book club for kids: free ideas and activities for the first meeting

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Book club for kids ideas for a first meeting: a short story read aloud in the room, three questions, one thing to make, and free sheets for 30, 45 or 60 minutes.

The best idea for a first kids' book club meeting is to read a short story aloud at the meeting itself, so nobody arrives unprepared, and then ask three questions and make one thing. The rest is detail: which story, which questions, what to make, and what to print. All of it is free on Peabody, like the rest of the site through the end of 2026, and none of it needs an account for you or for the children.

I built Peabody's Book Club so a first meeting could be run from one printer. The full method is in how to run a kids' book club; this is the short version for day one.

Before anyone arrives

- Print the sign-up sheet. It comes in 12 or 24 rows, with a column for each child's name, grade, Peabody reading level and a grown-up to reach.
- Print a meeting plan. There are three, minute by minute: 30 minutes for ages 5 to 7, 45 minutes for ages 7 to 11, and an hour for 10 and up.
- Read the story yourself first. It takes ten minutes.

Idea 1: read the book in the room

A meeting where half the group "didn't get to it" is a quiet one, so choose a story short enough to read aloud together. Peabody's library has 425 free stories on 19 reading levels, and the old tales are quick:

- Story: Goldilocks and the Three Bears · Level: 5 · Words: 175 · Read aloud, about: a minute and a half
- Story: Henny Penny · Level: 5 · Words: 180 · Read aloud, about: a minute and a half
- Story: Little Red Riding Hood · Level: 7 · Words: 367 · Read aloud, about: 3 minutes
- Story: How the Camel Got His Hump · Level: 8 · Words: 810 · Read aloud, about: 7 minutes
- Story: Cinderella · Level: 9 · Words: 1,069 · Read aloud, about: 9 minutes

The minutes are worked out at about 120 words a minute, the pace Peabody's club kits use for reading aloud. If your voice gives out, the button reads the story for you.

Pick the level for the readers who find reading hardest, not the ones who find it easiest. A strong reader enjoys an easy story; a struggling one only sits through a hard one.

Idea 2: let a club kit write the questions

Every story in that table has a club kit that prints on two pages. A kit has where the story comes from, the short version (it gives the ending away, so it is for the leader), the lesson in one line where there is one, six questions, three facts, one activity and a reading plan. The questions start with the ones the story's own page answers and move on to open questions for its kind of story. There are 69 kits, mostly classics from level 4 to 17, and no part of any of them is written by an AI model. For a group under eight, the Goldilocks kit is a gentle first one.

Idea 3: three questions, not ten

Three is plenty for a first meeting, and they work best when the children answer each other rather than you. A few that suit almost any story:

- Who was the story really about? Was it the one in the title?
- Was there a moment when you knew what would happen next?
- If you could change one thing, what would it be?

There are more in book club questions for any book, and the stories for a first book club list is a quick way to choose the book.

Idea 4: make one thing

Ten minutes of making something is enough. Each kit's activity fits its kind of story:

- A fable: act it out, then swap the ending.
- A fairy tale: draw the story as a map.
- A myth: make up a new myth.
- A legend: make a poster for the hero.
- A tale from elsewhere in the world: tell it round the circle, a bit each.
- A literary classic: cast the film.
- A true book: a fact hunt.

Idea 5: give the weeks between a shape

A club meets for an hour at most and then reads for a week or two, so the time between meetings matters most. Hand out a challenge: Book Bingo, twenty-five kinds of books on a card, gives everyone something to bring back, and over the holidays there is Winter Break, from 19 December 2026 to 3 January 2027. Both print, and both work on a family device under an animal face, with nothing typed by the child.

Idea 6: let the children choose the next book

End by choosing together. Bring three books and vote, or put what should I read next on a screen: three questions with three big boxes each (what kind, how long, on your own or together), and it picks one. "Another one" walks on to the next pick if the room says no.

What I would leave out

Prizes, rankings and quizzes to check who read it. Nobody comes back to be marked. When a club finishes a challenge, each child who reached the finish line prints a certificate; nobody gets one for half way.

Questions parents ask

How many children should come to a first meeting?

Small is easier. Four to eight is a circle where everyone gets a turn; with more, split into two groups with a grown-up each.

Do the children have to read at the same level?

No. Read the first story aloud and the levels stop mattering for that meeting. After that, the sign-up sheet has a column for each child's level, and the levels page has a "which level?" check of three lines read aloud.

What does it cost to run?

Nothing. There is nothing to buy and no account to make. Every sheet prints, and the tracker keeps what a child logs on the device it was logged on.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/book-club-for-kids-ideas