A kids' book club where everyone reads a different book

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How to run a theme book club for kids where each reader has a different book at their own level: picking the theme, the four books, a 45-minute plan and questions.

A book club doesn't need twelve copies of one book. In a theme club, every reader reads a different book of the same kind, each at their own level, and the club talks about all of them at once. It solves the two problems that stop most kids' clubs before they start: finding enough copies, and finding one book that suits a six-year-old and a ten-year-old. Peabody's any-book club kit has a planner that picks the books, a plan for the meeting, questions that work across the books, and roles to share out. Like the rest of Peabody, it is free through the end of 2026.

Why a theme works better than one book

One shared book makes a good club for readers of one age and one level. Mixed groups are harder: a sibling club, a homeschool co-op, a library club that welcomes every age, a classroom where reading levels run across four grades. Give them one book and someone is bored and someone is lost.

A theme fixes that. "Myths and legends" can be a picture-book retelling for a five-year-old and a long hero's tale for a twelve-year-old. Each reader is reading something they can manage, and the conversation is about what the stories share: what a myth explains, what makes a hero, which monster is worst.

Step 1: Pick the theme

Six kinds work well because every reader can find one at their level:

- Funny books. Easy to start with; everyone has a favourite joke.
- True books. Each reader becomes the expert on their topic.
- Animal stories. Good for the youngest readers.
- Adventure and mystery. Good for readers who want a plot that moves.
- Fairy tales and fables. Short, old, and full of lessons to argue about.
- Myths and legends. Heroes and monsters for readers of every age.

Let the club vote on the next theme at the end of each meeting. The kit's paper ballots, eight to a sheet, make the vote part of the fun.

Step 2: Give every reader a book

Pick the theme and the ages in the planner and it suggests four of Peabody's free stories, one for each reader, at the level children of that age usually read. Older readers get longer, harder books; younger ones get shorter books with pictures. Every story is free to read on a screen or to print from the library, so no one needs a copy from a shop.

Swap in books from your own shelves or the public library freely. The planner's picks are a starting point, not a rule.

Step 3: The 45-minute meeting

The kit prints one plan that works across every book of the kind:

1. Five minutes: hello. Each reader holds up their book: the title and one word for it.
2. Ten minutes: book talk. A minute each to tell the others about their book, without the ending.
3. Fifteen minutes: talk together. Four questions that work for every book of the kind. For a funny theme: "What was the funniest moment in your book?" and "Can a funny book be about something serious too?" For myths: "What did your myth explain about the world?" and "Who was the hero, and what was their weakness?"
4. Ten minutes: make something. A comic strip of the funniest moment, a fact card, a map of the journey, a hero card.
5. Five minutes: vote on the next kind of book, and swap books if anyone wants to.

Step 4: Share out the jobs

Roles make a quiet reader speak. The kit has six, in plain words, each with a sheet to fill in by hand: the Question Asker, the Word Collector, the Picture Maker, the Connection Finder, the Best Bit Reader and the Story Shrinker. In a theme club the Connection Finder has the best job of all: finding what the different books have in common.

For readers under seven, skip the roles and do one shared job together, like everyone drawing their favourite part.

Questions for any book

Some meetings don't need a theme. The kit's question cards, twelve for each age, print as cards to cut out, and work for any book: "Who would you give this book to?" for the youngest, "Which character would you most like to meet, and what would you ask them?" for eight to ten, and "Which detail seemed small at first but mattered later?" from eleven up. Shuffle them, and each reader draws one.

Making it a habit

A club that meets every two weeks with a new theme each time works through all six kinds in about three months, and every reader ends with six books they chose and talked about. Keep a list on the wall of every book anyone read, and readers will start borrowing each other's.

Readers can log every book in Peabody's reading challenges on their own devices, and the books land on their own bookshelf, where they tap what they thought.

Questions leaders ask

How many readers can a theme club have?

Four to eight works best for talking. With more, split into two tables with the same theme, and let each table report one thing to the other at the end.

What if two readers want the same book?

Let them. Two readers on one book can be partners for the book talk, and the planner can pick another for the next meeting.

Does it work with older children and teenagers?

Yes, and it often works better: older readers enjoy defending a book nobody else has read. Use the questions for eleven and up, and let them pick their own books within the theme.

Do we need to read Peabody's stories?

No. The planner suggests them because they're free and every child can open them at once, but any book of the kind works.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/book-club-different-books