Starting a classroom book club with thirty kids

Peabody guide · updated 2026-10-30

How to start a classroom book club with thirty kids: groups of five or six, a sign-up sheet, a class reading log, mixed reading levels and 30 to 60-minute meetings.

A classroom book club with thirty children is really five or six book clubs: groups of five or six, each with a book every member can read, a corner of the room and the same meeting plan. One circle of thirty is a lecture with a book in it. Six circles of five is a room full of children talking about books. This guide covers the groups, the sign-up sheet, a class reading log on the wall, how to handle very different reading levels, and the meeting plans, all of which are free to print from Peabody, like the rest of the site through the end of 2026. Nobody needs an account, children or teacher.

Why five or six to a group

Five or six is small enough that everyone talks at every meeting and large enough that a group still works with someone absent. Thirty divides cleanly either way: six groups of five, or five of six. Every group reads its own book, chosen for that group, which is what makes a mixed room manageable.

Day one: the sign-up sheet

The sign-up sheet prints with twelve rows or twenty-four, each with the child's name, grade, Peabody reading level and a grown-up to reach. For a class of thirty, print the twenty-four-row sheet and a twelve-row one, or one twelve-row sheet per group if you have already made the groups. It stays with you: it is paper, and nothing on it goes anywhere.

The level column is the one that does the work. Fill it in the first week (below), and the groups almost make themselves.

Levels in a mixed room

A class of thirty can easily span several reading levels. Peabody's stories sit on 19 levels, from first books to sound out at level 0 to strong teen readers at 18, and the usual matches run from kindergarten at level 3 to 8th grade at level 13.

To find each child's level quickly, use the three lines on the levels page: a child reads three short lines from real stories aloud to you, at levels 2, 6 and 10, and you stop at the first one that is hard going. Write the result in the level column. It is a rough guide, not a score, and a child's reading changes quickly, so treat it as where to start.

Then choose one of three ways to group:

- By level. Children at about the same level read the same book. Simple, but the groups

can feel labelled, so name them after their books, not their levels.

- One kind of story, several sizes. Every group reads the same kind of story at its own level, and the whole class can share what that kind does. Fairy tales work well: Goldilocks and the Three Bears is level 5, Little Red Riding Hood level 7, Cinderella level 9 and Beauty and the Beast level 10, and each has a club kit. For older readers, myths: Arachne the Weaver at 11 and Odysseus and the Cyclops at 15.
- Own book, shared question. Each child reads their own book at their own level, and the group meets about a question every book can answer: a brave character, a surprising ending, a book you would give a friend.

Whichever you choose, pick a group's book at the level of the reader who finds reading hardest. The strong readers will enjoy an easy book more than a struggling reader will survive a hard one, and every Peabody story is read aloud on request for the child who needs to hear it first.

The meeting plans

The meeting plans print minute by minute, three ways:

- Plan: 30 minutes · Who it suits: Ages 5 to 7, or a lunchtime club · The shape: Settle in, read aloud together, two questions, colour the chart and choose the next book.
- Plan: 45 minutes · Who it suits: Ages 7 to 11, the usual club · The shape: A snack and the one rule, one thing I liked and one I didn't, three questions, an activity, the next book.
- Plan: 60 minutes · Who it suits: Ages 10 and up, or a library group · The shape: A two-sentence recap, open discussion with a page to back each answer, the kit's facts, an activity in pairs, a short review or a vote on the next book.

In a classroom, there are two ways to run them. One group a day: you sit with one group while the rest read, so with five groups each one meets you once a week. Every group at once: each group has a child leader holding the questions, and you move between the circles. The first is calmer; the second is livelier and teaches the leaders a lot.

For the questions, use the ten that work for any book, or a club kit when the group is reading one of Peabody's stories. A kit has six questions with notes for the leader, three facts, an activity for that kind of story and a reading plan: one meeting for a short story, two or three by pages for a long one. It prints on two pages, which is exactly what a child leader needs.

The class reading log

The class reading log has thirty rows: reader, title, level and the date each book was finished. With thirty children it fills quickly, so print two, or one per group. Write the rows in date order as books are finished, and the log reads as what the class has been reading, not who is ahead. Peabody has no leaderboards, and I would keep it that way on the wall too.

Charts, devices and certificates

Paper is enough for a whole class: a challenge chart per child to colour, and the log on the wall. If you use tablets, the tracker holds up to six readers on one device under animal faces rather than names, which happens to be one group's worth. The books they log stay on the device; Peabody receives only a count that a book was logged. Children never type; for a book from the school library, you press and hold for two seconds and type the title.

Certificates print at the finish line of a challenge and only there. A blank certificate fills in by hand if a group finishes something of its own.

After the meeting

A book a group has finished is a good book for a report. The book report templates go by grade, from drawings in kindergarten to a thesis in middle school, each with a worked example on a free Peabody story, and each has a shorter review version that suits the end of a club meeting.

Questions teachers ask

How do I keep five groups on task at once?

Give every group the same plan, a child leader with the questions, and a job for everyone: timekeeper, page-finder, the one who reads the question aloud. Meet one group yourself and walk between the others.

Do the children need accounts or devices?

No. Everything prints, and the stories open in the library with no account. A device, if you use one, keeps up to six readers' logs on it and sends only a count, nothing about the books or the children.

Should I group friends together?

Group by book first. Friends can share a group when their reading fits, but a book every member can read matters more than who sits next to whom.

What about the child who can't read the group's book?

Choose an easier book for the group, or let that child hear it read aloud first and then read along. Being in the conversation is the point.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/classroom-book-club