How to run a kids' book club (ages 6 to 12): six steps and a 45-minute meeting

Peabody guide · updated 2026-10-30

How to run a kids' book club at home, in a classroom or at a library, ages 6 to 12: six steps, picking a book everyone can read, a 45-minute meeting and what to skip.

A kids' book club needs four things: a few children, a book each of them can read, a time to meet, and a question worth talking about. Everything else, the snacks, the charts and the certificates, is there to make those four easier. This guide is the whole method in six steps, with a 45-minute meeting plan, for a parent, a teacher, a librarian or a homeschool co-op. Every sheet it mentions 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 the children.

I built Peabody's Book Club for my own kids and their friends, and the rules below are the ones it is built on.

The six steps

1. Pick a level or a list. Either one book everyone can read, or each child reading their own book at their own level and meeting about a shared question. Books by level has Peabody's free stories at each of nineteen levels, and the kids' lists have the books from the library shelf.
2. Print the sign-up sheet. Twelve rows or twenty-four, with a column for each child's reading level and a grown-up to reach.
3. Hand out a chart. A challenge gives the weeks between meetings a shape: Winter Break over the holidays, Book Bingo for variety, 100 Books for little ones over a year. On paper or on a family device.
4. Read for two weeks. Long enough to finish a book, short enough to keep the group together. For children under seven, meet weekly and read the book together at the meeting.
5. Meet. Thirty to sixty minutes; the plan below is forty-five.
6. Certificates at the finish line, and only there. A child who finished the challenge gets one; nobody gets one for half way.

How big, and how often

Four to eight children is a club where everyone talks. Ten to twelve still works with a grown-up keeping the turns. A classroom of thirty splits into reading groups of five or six, each with its own book and its own corner. Every two weeks is a pace children keep: much longer and the club is forgotten between meetings, much shorter and the slower readers never finish.

Choosing the book

One book for everyone is the easiest club to run, as long as everyone can read it. Pick it at the level of the readers who find reading hardest, not the readers who find it easiest: the strong readers will enjoy an easy book more than the others will survive a hard one.

When the group is too mixed for one book, there are two good ways round it:

- One kind of story, several sizes. Peabody's library has fables, fairy tales and myths at many different levels, so each child can read a fable at their own level and the club can talk about what fables do: the animals, the trick, the lesson.
- Your own book, a shared question. Each child reads their own book and the meeting is about a question every book can answer: a brave character, a surprising ending, a book you would give a friend.

For the first meeting, a short classic is hard to beat: a fable or a folk tale reads aloud in under ten minutes, so nobody arrives unprepared. Ten stories for a first book club lists the easiest, each with a kit.

A 45-minute meeting

- Minutes: 5 · What happens: A snack and the one rule: everyone gets a turn, and nobody spoils the ending for someone still reading.
- Minutes: 10 · What happens: One thing I liked, one thing I didn't, round the circle. The leader goes first and keeps it short.
- Minutes: 15 · What happens: Three questions. Let the children answer each other, not only you.
- Minutes: 10 · What happens: Make something: act out a scene, draw the setting as a map, cast the film.
- Minutes: 5 · What happens: The next book, the charts, and who is reading what.

The meeting plans print this one, and a thirty-minute version for ages 5 to 7 and an hour for older readers, each with a notes column.

Good questions to ask

Open questions do the work. Ones that work for any book:

- What did the main character want, and what got in the way?
- Was there a moment you were surprised? Can you find the page?
- If you were the author, what would you change?
- Who would you give this book to?

There are ten in book club questions for any book, in the order a meeting uses them. For one of Peabody's own stories, its club kit has six questions of its own with notes for the leader, three facts, an activity and a reading plan, taken from the story's own page.

What to skip

- Grading the discussion. A club is the one place reading is not marked.
- Prizes for the most books. They reward speed and short books. A finish line everyone can reach rewards finishing.
- Minute logs for children under eight. Count books, or days with reading.
- Quizzes to check the child read it. Children who have not read the book find that out at the first meeting; open questions do the checking and start a conversation instead.

Keeping it going

Put the charts on a wall where the club meets: children like seeing each other's fill, and nobody needs a ranking. Let the children choose the next book from three you bring, or from what should I read next, which asks three tap-to-answer questions. And keep the meetings short enough that the children want one more.

Questions parents ask

What age can a book club start?

Five, with a book read aloud at the meeting and a thirty-minute plan. From about seven, children can read the book at home and come ready to talk.

Do the children need accounts or devices?

No. Everything prints. A family that wants the tracker uses it on any browser, under an animal face, with nothing typed by the child and nothing sent.

How do I handle the child who talks the whole time?

Give everyone a turn in order before anyone has a second one, and hand the talker a job: reading a question aloud, or keeping the time.

What if nobody liked the book?

That is a good meeting. "What would have made it better?" is one of the best questions a club can ask.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/how-to-run-a-kids-book-club