

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!  
All you need are some friends who are as excited about  
the books they read as you are and a little bit of organization.

### HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

**The best way to find people to be in your book club is to ask your friends.**  
Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your club, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

### **Figure out when and where you want to meet.**

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "where"s and "when"s right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

### **Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.**

Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's web site) or at your local library or bookstore.

**The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a book club. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!**

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit  
[www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians](http://www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians)

An unflinching novel in verse  
about a girl, her family,  
and the devastating power of silence.



### **Because I Am Furniture**

by Thalia Chaltas

978-0-670-06298-0 (HC) • \$16.99

978-0-14-241510-8 (PB) • \$8.99

Ages 12 up • Grades 7 up

Anke's father is abusive. But not to her. He attacks her brother and sister, but she's just an invisible witness in a house of horrors, on the brink of disappearing altogether. Until she makes the volleyball team at school. As Anke becomes part of the team, her confidence builds. When she learns to yell "Mine!" to play the ball, she finds a voice she didn't know existed. Soon she's imagining a day when her voice will be loud enough to be heard at home, too. A richly textured story told in poems, *Because I Am Furniture* delves into the complicated world of domestic violence and examines the destructive effects of silence.

• An ALA Best Book for Young Adults

★ "...offering empowerment and hope, Chaltas's poems leave  
an indelible mark." —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review



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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Thalia Chaltas

Because  
I  
Am  
Furniture

## ABOUT THE BOOK



In her family, Anke feels as significant as the living-room sofa. Her father is physically and emotionally abusive to her sister and her brother, but he ignores Anke. Her mother is in denial about his cruelty and goes meekly through the motions of being a “good” mother. Despite knowing her father’s treatment of her siblings is wrong, Anke is lonely and questions her own worth—if she’s not worthy of even bad attention, does she really deserve good attention?

Desperate to belong, Anke joins the volleyball team in spite of her father’s disapproval. She makes a new friend, becomes a star player, and ultimately finds her voice. She falls for Kyler, a soccer player, and sorts through her feelings for her neighbor Jed. As her confidence grows, she gains the courage to stand up to her father when he attacks a childhood friend. In breaking the family silence, Anke gives them all a chance at a new life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a teenager, THALIA CHALTAS wanted to do everything, and she envied people who knew without question what their life goal was. Thalia did preliminary training to be a kinesiologist, a helicopter pilot, and a firefighter, and has at times been a bus driver, a ropes course instructor, and a contralto in an a cappella group. Along the way she has played lots of volleyball, written poetry, and collected children’s books. Eventually, she realized writing was what all this previous intensive training was for. She lives in California with her daughter. *Because I Am Furniture* is her debut novel.

Visit her at [www.thaliachaltas.com](http://www.thaliachaltas.com).

## PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The title *Because I Am Furniture* is a metaphor—a comparison of two unlike things without the use of “as” or “like.” What does the comparison of “I” and “furniture” suggest to you about the narrator and the story?
- We have all been in situations in which we felt invisible or unheard. Describe a situation in which you felt invisible and elaborate on your feelings. Were you angry? Hurt? Confused? Did you gain visibility? If so, how?

- Can you think of a time when you felt caught between telling the truth and protecting someone you cared about? Explain.
- Have you ever felt envious or jealous of a sibling or friend? Share how you worked through your emotions.
- Describe a time in which you felt torn between two people whom you loved. How did you resolve the conflict?

## POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Because I Am Furniture* is a verse novel—a collection of poems that work together as a complete story. Identify several passages in which the visual layout of the lines contributes to the mood and/or emotion of the story. What effect does the layout of these lines create? What role does punctuation play?
- Conflict is central to a story. *Because I Am Furniture* addresses three forms of conflict: man against man, man against self, and man against society. Discuss how each type of conflict applies to the story.
- Describe Anke’s relationships with her brother, Darren, and her sister, Yaicha, in Part I of the story. In what way is she “furniture” to them? Why?
- Anke makes the volleyball team and becomes an exceptional player. How does being a member of the team shape her identity?
- Compare and contrast Anke’s perceptions of her mother with those of her father. How are they alike? How are they different? Does Anke seem to love one parent more than the other? Explain.
- Anke is aware of her father’s abuse of her sister and brother and has conflicting feelings about her own relationship with him. At one point she says, “I think that it is supposed to be good that I get less from him but I feel worth less.” Why do you believe she feels this way? Is her response normal?
- One might argue that Angeline is a character foil for Anke. How does Angeline’s perception of Anke’s father contrast with Anke’s feelings?
- Anke’s mother remains silent about the abuse and yet Anke calls her mother an “oasis.” What do you think contributes to Anke’s contradictory feelings about her mother? Is Anke’s mother a good mother? Support your response with passages from the novel.
- In what way is school a haven for Anke? In what way does she feel threatened while there?
- At one point in the story Anke says Rona is the only person to whom she could tell the truth. Compare and contrast Rona and Angeline. Why does Anke feel safe with Rona? Why does Anke distrust Angeline?

- Compare and contrast Anke’s feelings for Jed and Kyler. Make a case for one boy being “furniture” in Anke’s life. In what way might Anke be like her father?
- Anke’s parents do not support her efforts to play volleyball, but she excels at the sport anyway. Discuss the scene in which Darren comes to watch Anke practice volleyball. What is Anke’s response? Why do you think Darren comes? Does this scene create a turning point in their relationship?
- One morning after her father has beaten Darren, Anke notices the bruise on his torso. She describes her feelings: “. . . and I felt my upholstery rip and bits of fluff escape to float away.” What does Anke mean? Find other references to furniture and discuss how they contribute to the overall meaning of the story. How are chairs in particular symbols or metaphors for Anke’s life? For that of her father? For their relationship? Find passages to support your response.
- Victims of domestic violence become caught in the abuse cycle because they buy into the belief that the abuser abuses because he/she loves the victim. Does Anke fall into this cycle during any point in the novel? Why or why not? In the end, Anke breaks the cycle for her family. How might her role as an outsider give her courage? In your response, consider the passage, “Or maybe I am just outside enough, being the footstool observing from the corner that I have a view of reality.”
- At the end of the novel, Darren, Yaicha, and Anke build a bonfire in the backyard and burn their father’s chair. Explain the significance of this scene.
- The story takes place in the fall, and numerous references are made to autumn colors (e.g., reds, yellows, and browns). How does this color imagery contribute to the story? Many references are made to ice and fire and similar oppositions (e.g., cold and heat). What purpose do these images serve? How does the author’s use of sensory imagery contribute to the overall tone and mood of the book?
- Symbolism abounds in references to wood, leaves, and trees. Identify several passages containing these motifs and discuss their meanings. Pay particular attention to the old hemlock tree and what happens to it toward the end of the story.
- Near the end of the book, Anke, Darren, and Yaicha sit together against the hemlock tree stump. How does this scene bring closure to the story? To this time in the family’s life?
- How do you envision Anke’s relationship with her mother in five years? Her father? What about her relationships with Darren and Yaicha?