

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 "wheres" and "whens" 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.

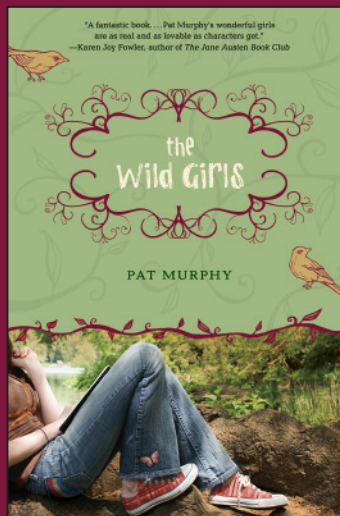
Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.

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 website) 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

What makes a Wild Girl?



The Wild Girls

by Pat Murphy

978-0-670-06226-3 (HC) • \$16.99

978-0-14-241245-9 (PB) • \$7.99

Ages 10 up • Grades 5 up

Twelve-year-old Joan is sure she'll hate her new home when she moves to California from Connecticut. But she finds a kindred spirit in Sarah, who prefers to be called "Fox," and discovers new things about herself as they explore the woods and imagine stories together. After one of their stories wins a prize, the two girls are recruited for a prestigious summer writing program. With the help of the teacher, Verla Volante, Joan and Fox learn more about writing, but also discover a lot about friendship, family, and how to ask the right questions.

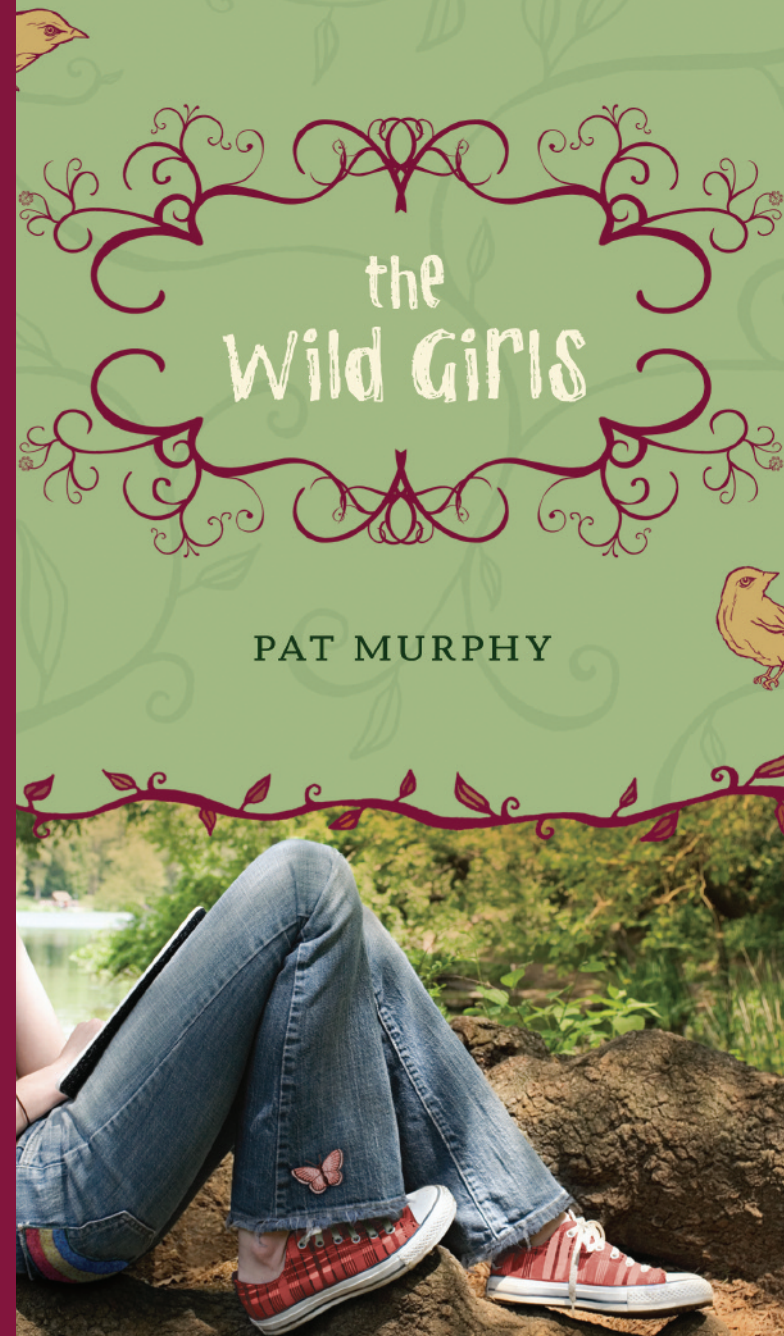


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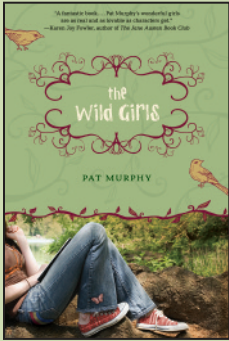
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK



Twelve-year-old Joan is sure that she is going to be miserable in her new home. Then she meets a kindred spirit: Sarah, who prefers to be called “Fox” and who lives with her writer father in a rundown house in the middle of the woods.

Joan and Sarah—Newt and Fox—spend all their spare time outside, talking and playing in the woods, and soon start writing stories together. When they win first place in a student fiction contest, they’re recruited for a prestigious summer writing class taught by a free spirit named Verla Volante.

The Wild Girls is about friendship, the power of story, and how coming of age means finding your own answers—rather than simply taking adults on faith.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PAT MURPHY’s writing has won numerous awards, including the Nebula Award, the World Fantasy Award, and the Seiun Award, the latter for the best science fiction novel translated into Japanese. In addition to writing in a range of styles, she has worked for the Crucible (www.thecrucible.org), a nonprofit school dedicated to teaching the industrial arts and the fire arts (from blacksmithing to fire eating), and edits books for Klutz Press.

For more about Pat’s work, visit www.brazenhussies.net/murphy. For writing advice, teaching tips, and more, visit www.verlavalante.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is Gus, Fox’s father, different from Joan’s father? How are Joan and Fox influenced by each man? How do the things you learn about the girls’ fathers change your perception of each character?
- Joan is friends with both Cindy and Fox, even though the two of them are very different. Describe the qualities that allow Joan to be friends with both girls at the same time. What makes these two friendships important?

- Why does Joan feel that Fox doesn’t fit in at school? Why do you think Fox’s actions are different when she’s in school and when she’s in the woods with Joan? At the writing class? Do you fit in differently when you’re in different situations and places?
- Fox and Joan refuse to dissect the frog for biology class. Do you agree with the way they handled the situation? How did what Joan and Fox learned compare to what their classmates learned?
- Why does Sarah go by the name “Fox”? What makes her Queen of the Foxes? By the end of the book, is she Queen of the Foxes for the same reasons?
- When Fox and Joan are getting ready to read their story to the audience, they both feel as though their story doesn’t belong to them anymore. Why does each girl feel that way? What makes a story belong to someone? Does the author own the story? Does the reader?
- Where does the title of the book come from? Why do you think that is important to the story? What emotions do the girls, their story, and their performance of the initial story they write elicit in the people around them?
- In writing class, Joan initially dismisses Priscilla as part of the “glamour squad.” What does she learn about her classmates as the summer goes on? Find a few examples where someone makes an assumption about another person that turns out to be incorrect, and explain how the character came to perceive the other person differently. Have you ever made assumptions about people that turned out to be incorrect?
- Names and nicknames are important in this book for Sarah/Fox, Joan/Newt, and Priscilla/Zoom. Why are these nicknames significant for each character? Can you think of nicknames for any of the other characters? Do you have a nickname? If not, what would you like to be called?
- Gus tells Joan that it’s important to “say it in her own words” when explaining something to someone else. Why? When Joan writes the message in her own words, how does that change the meaning of what she’s trying to say?
- Why do you think Mark starts to get in so much trouble? Do you think he deserves his punishment? How does Mark change after getting in trouble?
- How do Mark and Joan feel about their father? Does Joan’s impression of him change over the course of the book? Does your impression of him change? How does Joan’s father change by the end of the book?

- Fox’s mother gets in touch with Gus and Fox again after a number of years by writing a letter. After receiving the letter, Fox calls her mother and eventually meets her in person. What is the importance of each interaction that Fox has with her mother? How is the story changed by each of these interactions?
- Inspired by Verla and the writing class, Joan starts to ask more questions of the people around her. What does she learn from asking these questions? How does she learn which questions to ask? How would that make her a better writer? Can you find an example of how asking questions directly affects her writing?
- Joan’s view of her mother changes during the course of the book. How do the stories Fox and Joan write and the questions they ask contribute to Joan’s perception of her mother?
- By the end of the book, how has Joan changed? How do the people she’s close to think she’s changed and what enables them to see those changes? Joan describes all the things she has learned at the end of the book. How do you think what she’s learned will change the way she acts beyond the end of the story?
- In each assignment, Verla gives the class something new to work on. Identify three techniques or new perspectives that Verla has the class work on and explain how Joan learns more about creative writing through each technique. How does what Joan learns about writing change how she perceives others?

WRITING PROMPTS

- Find all of Verla Volante’s assignments for the summer writing class. Pick one that appeals to you and complete that exercise. Why did you pick this one? What, if anything, does this do for your perception of the world? Share your work with the class. Discuss which of Verla’s assignments was most popular among your classmates, noting any different interpretations students may have had about the purpose of each one. What interpretations were particularly interesting or innovative?
- Imagine that Fox or Joan has asked you about your family. What would you consider the most important thing for her to know? Write about it in a story or short essay.
- Visit www.verlavalante.com to learn more about writing techniques and to find more prompts and ideas. Choose a few techniques or prompts and complete them.