

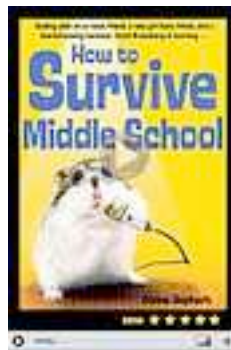
# Complete Guide to Planning Your Book Club Meeting

*How to Survive Middle School*

By

Donna Gephart

Delacorte Books by Young Readers (April 2010)



A Guide Created by Cindy Hudson for Mother Daughter Book Club.com  
<http://motherdaughterbookclub.com>

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Dear Reader:

Thank you for choosing this Complete Guide to Planning Your Book Club Meeting kit from [www.MotherDaughterBookClub.com](http://www.MotherDaughterBookClub.com) to help you organize your get-together.

As a member of multiple book clubs for more than a decade, I've hosted many meetings for up to 14 people. This kit reflects the kind of information I would like to have had as I planned each gathering.

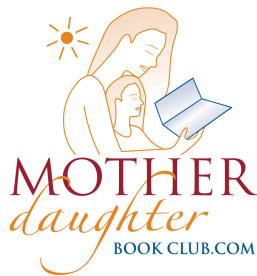
The recommendations here are designed to work with multiple age groups and vary in their difficulty to implement. Most of the suggestions work well for mother-daughter book clubs and kids book clubs, whether those groups meet at homes, schools or libraries.

If you have questions or concerns about anything you read here, please send me a note at [info@motherdaughterbookclub.com](mailto:info@motherdaughterbookclub.com).

I welcome feedback. And if you have other titles to recommend for future offerings, I'm happy to receive your suggestions.

Best regards,

Cindy Hudson



Please note: the information in these pages can be used to plan your book club meeting to discuss *How to Survive Middle School* by Donna Gephart. Where links to the Internet are listed, you should be able to click on them from your PDF document to be connected to the website mentioned. Website addresses are listed in full so you can refer to them when you're working from a printed version.

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## Book Review: *How to Survive Middle School* by Donna Gephart

Reviewed by Cindy Hudson for Mother-Daughter Book Club.com

David Greenburg is 11 years old and about to start middle school. He's not too worried until his older cousin Jack tells him about the horrors he may face, including a toilet-bowl swirlie on his birthday. David has other worries on his mind too: his mom left the family to live on a farm in Maine that has no electricity or phone service, his best friend Elliott no longer speaks to him, and his older sister Lindsay is hostile a lot of the time. The only good thing he has going is his grandmother, Bubbe, the *TalkTime* videos he records and posts on YouTube, and his pet hamster.

Things start to look up when he meets Sophie on his first day of school. Sophie is just starting public school after being taught at home by her mom, and she loves David's videos. When she spreads the word about *TalkTime* through her homeschool network, David's videos suddenly become way more popular than he is, leading to consequences both good and bad.

*How to Survive Middle School* by Donna Gephart is a funny and poignant look at a trying time of life for most adolescents. The comforts of elementary school are gone, some kids are maturing way faster than others, teachers are stricter, and new friendships are forming while old ones may be falling away. Bullies may be more of a problem. Gephart does a great job of showing how conflicted David feels about so much going on around him.

Mother-daughter book clubs with girls aged 9 to 12 will find a lot to talk about here—friendships, family relationships, relating to parents after divorce, pets, YouTube, and both the rewards and pitfalls of growing up. You may also want to serve Bubbe's Jewish Apple Cake (recipe included at the back of the book) when you get together to talk about this book.

I laughed a lot and cried a little while reading *How to Survive Middle School*, and I highly recommend it.

## Q and A with Author Donna Gephart



Where were you born?

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

How did you get started as a writer?

My writing career began when my mother took me to get armloads of picture books at the Northeast Regional Library in Philadelphia every week. When I was old enough to get to the library independently on my sister's purple banana seat bike with a flowered basket on the handlebars, I discovered some of my favorite middle grade books -- *Ben and Me*, *Mr. Popper's Penguins* and *The Hundred Dresses*. Complete and utter boredom led to the writing of my first short story at age ten. It was about a horse named Happy-Go-Lucky who died. (It wasn't very happy.) But my mother's reaction to that first story made me very happy. She loved it! That's when I decided I would be a writer when I grew up. (Perhaps I've never quite grown up, but I have indeed become a writer.)

What does a typical writing day look like for you?

With teenagers, pets, volunteer work, etc. I don't think there is such a

thing as a "typical" writing day for me. But an ideal writing day would consist of beginning the day with exercise, often a long walk, then several hours of writing. After a break for lunch, I might spend the afternoon revising, answering e-mails, preparing for a speaking engagement, etc. The evening is usually reserved for family and friends, unless I'm on a tight deadline. In that case, it would be back to the computer for more writing or revising. I always try to read whenever possible during the day. I still love reading!

### What do you like best about being a writer?

After all these years, I still wake on Monday morning super excited to get to "work." It's hard for me to refer to writing as work because I enjoy it so much. I love spending time in my character's world. I love revising and watching a book take shape. I love playing with language.

Writing and revising are often like solving a puzzle, and I love solving puzzles. After a book is done and out in the world, one of my favorite things is connecting with young readers during school visits or via their e-mails.

### What do you not like about being a writer?

I do not like the days when my mind is gathering, not producing. It's frustrating, but a necessary part of the creative process.

### Tell us three interesting/crazy things about yourself.

My characters, I think, have more interesting lives than I do.

Hmm.

1. I'm a vegetarian and have been for more than twenty years. (See, not too exciting.)
2. Each of my two sisters has appeared on TV games shows and won some nice prizes. (I've never been on a TV game show, but I wrote about a girl who appeared on the TV quiz show Jeopardy. That novel is called *Olivia Bean, Trivia Queen* and comes out early in 2012.)
3. I won second place in my school talent show when I was in 7th grade.

My talent? A seriously amazing hula hoop routine!

Do you have any favorite quotes or words you live by?

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read." *Groucho Marx*

What were your three favorite books (or authors) when you were young and why did they leave a strong impression on you?

*Mr. Popper's Penguins* (by Richard Atwater and Florence Atwater)

*Ben and Me* (by Robert Lawson)

*The Hundred Dresses* (by Eleanor Estes)

I don't know why, but these books stayed with me. It's hard to know why a certain book connects so strongly with some young readers, but these are the ones that stayed with me from childhood.

If you could choose any author – living or dead – to have a conversation with, who would it be and what three questions would you most like to have him or her answer?

I think I would like to speak to the amazing humorist, Erma Bombeck. I would ask how she managed to write books and several humorous essays every week for nearly thirty years while raising three children. Her talent and dedication continue to inspire me.

I had the good fortune of speaking at the Erma Bombeck Writers Workshop in Dayton, Ohio and meeting Erma's children and grandchildren. If Erma were alive today, she would be so proud of her lovely family.

Is there anything else you'd like readers to know?

Reading is the single most important thing you can do to invite success and happiness into your life. It's also one of the best ways I know to walk in someone else's shoes and understand different people who live in different ways than you do. What a great way to promote understanding and tolerance.

For more information about the author, visit her website:

<http://www.donnagephart.com/>

Other books by Donna Gephart:

*As If Being 12-3/4 Isn't Bad Enough, My Mother Is Running For President*  
(Delacorte Books for Young Readers, February 2008)

Coming in spring 2012:

*Olivia Bean, Trivia Queen*



## Recommended Activities

### Simple Activities

Create a bookmark reflecting a character or theme from the book.

Before the Meeting:

Look for a template to download or create your own blank bookmarks using card stock or colored paper. Creativity-Portal.com has several templates for you to download, print and cut out. Just enter “bookmark template” in the search box on the website. If you prefer to make your own, instructions are provided.

Gather materials for making the bookmarks. You may want to include glue, scissors, glitter, no. 2 pencils, colored pencils, blank paper, rulers, stickers, or more. You could even gather images from magazines that the girls can cut out to make a collage.

During the Meeting:

Encourage everyone to think of something from the book that they especially liked or remember.

Ask everyone to think about what they would like to put on their bookmark and draw a rough draft on the blank paper.

Spend about 20 minutes creating the bookmarks.

To make your creations more durable, you can seal them between two sheets of laminate paper (found in office supply stores).

### Play a game

David plays with a Rubik's Cube when he needs to think about solving problems. Get one or more Rubik's Cubes for the meeting and take turns trying to solve it.

Create your own set of trivia questions related to the book, divide into two teams, and take turns answering them.

### Fill in three or more generations on a family tree

When David's mom tells him her family was originally from Poland, it's too late for his class assignment. You can prepare for questions about your ancestry in advance by creating your own family tree. Go to Mid-Continent Public Library's web page for the Midwest Genealogy Center to download free forms that will work for you.

<http://www.mymcpl.org/genealogy> (Click on Family History Forms in the left sidebar.)

## More Involved Activity (But Lots of Fun)

### Create a video and share it with friends or post it on YouTube

David obviously loves working on his videos and he's good at it. While this project will take more work than the simple ones, it should also be a lot of fun. You'll need a video camcorder, so if no one in the group owns one, look into renting one by searching online for rental sources near you.

Before you get started, you may want to read this Ezine article titled How to Create Your Own YouTube Video:

<http://ezinearticles.com/?How-To-Create-Your-Own-YouTube-Video&id=664000>

Then check to see if your computer has software for you to edit your video once it's filmed. Most Apple computers come with iMovie pre-

installed. PCs often use Windows Live Movie Maker. Other programs are also available to purchase.

Hold a planning meeting to decide what kind of video you want to create. Do you want to write a video review of *How to Survive Middle School*? Would you like to create a list of books you recommend for other mother-daughter book clubs? Do you want to focus on a community issue?

Once you've decided what you want your video to be about, you can discuss who will write the script, who will find or create props, who will decide on music, who will be responsible for most of the recording, who will appear on screen, etc.

After your video is live, be sure to tell everyone you know about it so you can start watching the number of viewers tally go up. Also, send it in to me and depending on your topic, I may be able to post it at Mother Daughter Book Club.com.

## Discussion Questions

When David gets frustrated with his best friend Elliot, he says some hurtful things to him. Elliot retaliates and soon their long-term friendship is in trouble. Why do you think it was so hard for the boys to say they were sorry to each other? What do you think they could have each done differently? Do you often hear people say things they don't mean when they are angry? In general do you think it's difficult for people to admit when they've done something they regret?

Talk about one of your favorite characters and why you liked him or her.

David is upset about a lot of things in his life, but he feels as though he can't talk to anyone about what's bothering him. What advice would you give him?

David loves to record videos that he posts on YouTube. Is there something you really enjoy doing the same way? Tell the group about it.

Do you watch videos on YouTube? If so, how do you find new ones to watch? How do you think this plays into videos "going viral"?

What do you think about David's decision to include his sister in his videos without her knowing about it?

How does David connect to the people around him through *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart? Think about the media that you enjoy—television shows, music, books. How do they help you connect with friends and family? How do they keep you from connecting?

How do you think Hammy helped David work through some of the problems he faced?

What do you think about the role David's mom played in the story?

What do you think happens after the story ends?

What do you think you'll remember most about the story a year from now? Why?

## Recommended Recipes

### “Peaceful” Chocolate Chip Pancakes

Serves 3 to 4

Sometimes it’s fun to surprise everyone by having breakfast for dinner. In this case, you can even tie the pancakes to the book. Near the beginning, David’s mom signs a letter to him, “Peace and pancakes.” Once you’ve cooked up your own pancakes from the recipe below, you can hand everyone a bowl of chocolate chips and ask them to sprinkle the chips on in the shape of a peace sign. This recipe serves about four people and can easily be doubled or tripled.

1-1/2 cups all purpose flour  
2 tablespoons granulated sugar  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1-1/4 cups of milk (for thinner pancakes, use 1-1/2 cups)  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla (optional)  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 cup milk or semi-sweet chocolate chips

Mix all the dry ingredients together in a large bowl. Hollow out a well in the center and add the milk. Slightly beat the eggs and add them in, along with the vanilla and vegetable oil. Whisk until ingredients are blended. The mixture can be slightly lumpy.

Heat a non-stick skillet or griddle on medium heat. Coat with non-stick cooking spray or add a dab of butter. Using a ladle or a ¼-cup measuring cup, pour batter onto skillet. When the pancake starts to bubble on top and is firm around the edges, flip with a spatula and continue cooking until golden brown.

Flip cooked pancakes onto a plate and place in the oven to keep warm while you continue cooking. Butter if desired.

## Sausage Soup

Serves 6 to 8

David finds out his mother's family is from Poland. This easy to prepare Polish-style soup can be made with Polish kielbasa sausage, but if you prefer, you can substitute any of your favorite chicken sausages or something else that's spicy. Serve it with freshly sliced French bread and a green salad.

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 1/2 lbs spicy sausage such as kielbasa or andouille, sliced into 1-1/2 inch rounds

1 cup onion, chopped

2 cups celery, chopped

4 cups cabbage, shredded

2 cups carrots, sliced

1 bay leaf

3 cups beef or chicken broth

2 cups water

3 cups potatoes, peeled and cubed

salt and pepper to taste

In large soup pot, sauté onions and celery in olive oil for 5 minutes. Add sausage and continue cooking until sausages are lightly browned. Add all other ingredients except potatoes. Bring to a boil, turn heat to low and simmer for 1 hour. Add potatoes and cook another 15 minutes or until tender.

Season with salt and pepper to taste.

## Bubbe's Jewish Apple Cake

Serves 8

Don't forget dessert! Author Donna Gephart recommends this recipe from the book.

4 large apples

1 tablespoon lemon juice  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
4 eggs  
1-1/2 cups sugar, plus 2 tablespoons  
1 cup applesauce  
3 cups flour  
3 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 cup orange juice  
1 tablespoon vanilla  
1/2 cup raisins (optional)  
powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease and flour a 10-inch tube pan. Pare and slice apples. Soak apples in a large bowl of water with 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Set aside.

Combine two tablespoons sugar and two teaspoons cinnamon and set aside. Beat eggs; beat in 1-1/2 cups sugar gradually; then beat in applesauce. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking powder and salt. Add flour mixture and orange juice alternately to applesauce mixture, starting with flour mixture, stirring after each addition. Add vanilla and stir. Mix in raisins (optional).

Pour 1/4 of the batter into greased pan; arrange 1/3 of the apple slices on top; sprinkle with 1/3 of the cinnamon mixture. Repeat layers twice, then add a layer of batter to the top.

Bake at 350 degrees for 80 minutes or until a knife comes out clean.

Enjoy, bubelah!