

HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

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

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

The best way to find people to be in your reading group 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 reading group, 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.

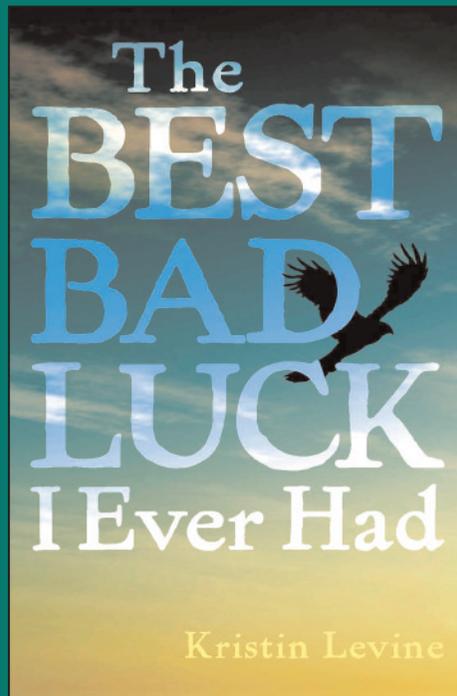
Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make 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.

This is another one that sounds a little scary but totally isn't. 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 reading group. 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



The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had

by Kristin Levine

ISBN: 978-0-399-25090-3 • \$16.99

Ages 10 up • Grades 5 up

An unexpected friendship between
a white farm boy and an African-American
city girl sends ripples through a rural Alabama town
in this captivating historical novel.



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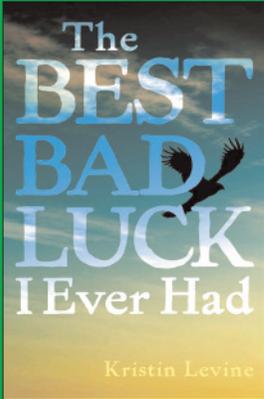
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

The
BEST
BAD
LUCK
I Ever Had

Kristin Levine

ABOUT THE BOOK



The last thing Harry “Dit” Sims expects when Emma Walker comes to town is to become friends. Proper-talking, brainy Emma doesn’t play baseball or fish too well, but she sure makes Dit think, especially about the differences between black and white. But soon Dit is thinking about a whole lot more when the town barber, who is black, is put on trial for a terrible crime. Together Dit and Emma come up with a daring plan to save him from the unthinkable.

Set in 1917 and inspired by the author’s family history, this is the poignant story of a remarkable friendship and the perils of small-town justice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kristin Levine received her BA in German from Swarthmore College and an MFA in film and electronic media from American University. She spent a year in Vienna, Austria, working as an au pair and has taught screenwriting at American University. Currently, she lives in Alexandria, Virginia, with her husband and young daughter. *The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had* is her first novel.

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DISCUSSION AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- When the Walkers first move to town, a lot of Moundville residents don’t like them because they are black. But the only reason why Dit doesn’t like Emma is because she’s a girl. Why does the Walkers’ race matter less to Dit than it does to many of the other townspeople?
- Throughout the book, Dit tries to earn money and practice his shooting for the Fourth Hunt. Why is it so important to him to win this competition?
- Why does Dit believe that Emma tattled on him to Mrs. Seay about the broken window? Did *you* ever believe that Emma told Mrs. Seay?
- Dit and Emma are exact opposites in many regards: upbringing, family, interests, skin color. How do you think they are able to get along so well despite their differences?
- Why does Dit get so angry when Buster calls him a “nigger lover”? Why does this insult upset him more than any of the other teasing?
- How does Dit react when Buster and Chip lock him in the jail cell? Why does he react this way? What else could he have done?
- How does Emma convince Mrs. Seay that she was wrong about the Great War? Has one of your teachers ever been wrong about something? Why do you think it is hard for teachers to admit when they have taught something wrong?
- When Big Foot comes to the play rehearsal to tell Emma she can’t be in the play, all the children are on Emma’s side. Why is it easier for the Moundville children to accept the Walkers than it is for many of the Moundville adults?
- Why was Emma so excited about being in the play, and why is she so upset when she’s not allowed to be?
- Why do you think Doc Haley always lets Big Foot just take his hair tonic without paying for it? What makes Doc change his mind and demand payment, even though he knows this will infuriate Big Foot?

- Why is Big Foot so cruel to the black people in Moundville?
- Technically, Doc Haley gets a trial; however, the jury never considers that he shot Big Foot out of self-defense. Why is his trial so unjust? What could have been done to make it more fair?
- One reason why Dit insists on freeing Doc from jail is that Dit believes himself to be partially responsible for Doc’s imprisonment. Do you think it is Dit’s fault that the men’s fight escalated into gunfire? Is Elbert right or wrong to blame Dit?
- Mrs. Pooley is upset that her son was killed, and she has always been clear about her dislike for black people. So why does she help Dit and Emma free Doc Haley?
- Why does Dit spend his \$2 on Mrs. Pooley’s eagle? Do you think this was a sensible way for him to spend his money?
- Dit is always practicing shooting with his flip-it. What does it symbolize when he throws the flip-it into the fire at the end of the book?
- What are some things that Dit learns from being friends with Emma? What are some things that Emma learns from being friends with Dit? Which of them do you think changes more significantly over the course of the story? Why?
- One of the things Dit wants most, throughout the book, is to become a man. What is his definition of what it means to be a man and how does that understanding change over the course of the book? Do you think Dit is more adult at the end of the book than he was at the beginning? What evidence do you have to support your argument?
- The Civil War ended more than 50 years before *The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had* takes place. What are some ways that the after-effects of the war are still felt in Moundville?
- How can you tell from the author’s writing style that this book takes place in 1917, and in the rural South? Find specific word use or phrases that are different from the way people speak today.
- Which scene in this book upset you the most? Which scene made you happiest?