

Book Club Guide

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah Witman Moore



Leah Witman Moore has been teaching English and Theater for over sixteen years. She is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin and has a master's in Educational Theater from New York University. She was the recipient of the prestigious, Teacher of the Year award, presented to ten New York City Teachers annually. She has taught writing to more than 1,700 students and engages fourteen-year-old freshmen daily. Her family has been featured in a documentary about Cri du Chat, a rare chromosomal disability. She has been a guest on popular media outlets, such as ESPN and Forbes, working to create more stories centering around individuals with disabilities. She lives in New York with her husband, three children, and her daughter's collection of rainbow wigs.

LOVING YOU BIG

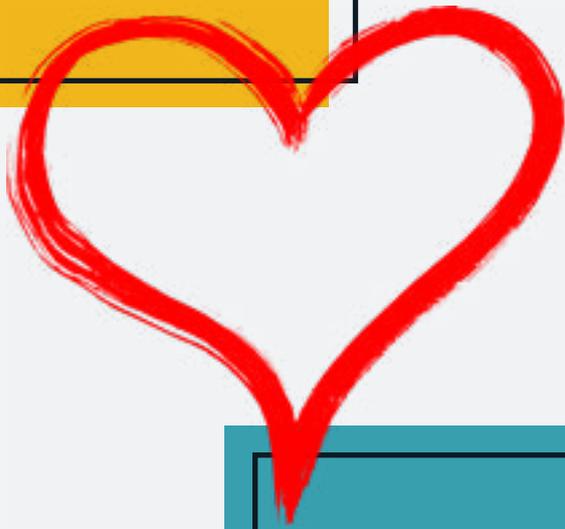
Book Club Guide



If your book club is looking for an engaging memoir about balancing motherhood and sanity, *Loving You Big* by Leah Witman Moore is the perfect fit. Reading it is like sitting down with a friend talking after a long day and leaving with a renewed sense of what you value in the world.

Here is everything you need to host a successful book club gathering:

- A synopsis of *Loving You Big*
- An excerpt from the book
- Reviews from other readers
- *Loving You Big* discussion questions
- Hosting Inspiration
- Bonus Features



SYNOPSIS

Before becoming a mother, Leah Witman Moore would zoom through the day with her to-do list in hand, happily teaching high school students, and returning home to her loving husband, Zachary.

Then their first child, Jordan, was born with an extremely rare syndrome called Cri Du Chat. And when their twin boys, Austin and Oliver, were born four years later, they found themselves surrounded by neurosurgeons and oncologists, once again testing the resolve of their sanity and their marriage.

In *Loving You Big*, Leah Witman Moore recounts how she learns to balance the joys and sorrows of her life as she navigates between wig-clad dance parties and the painful loss of loved ones. This powerful and poignant memoir teaches readers to celebrate every small victory, savor every chaotic moment, and recognize the profound impact of a kind word.



CHAPTER 1

Redefining Connection

I am done being quiet.

It's not that I didn't talk when I was younger; in fact, I used thousands of words a day. Most of my family did—my poor father rarely got to speak more than five a night. “How was school today, girls?” Then he would sit back as my mom, my sister, and I took over for the rest of the evening.

It was just safer being nonconfrontational. I was happy to redirect and let what was unsaid linger. I floated through my uneventful childhood, getting lost in the stories of other people. Shakespeare. Angelou. Morrison. I preferred to read the words of others who redefined what it meant to have something to say.

I thought words were the best way to make connections with people, so I started to practice them. On paper. In short stories. On the stage. I spent hours playing Word Munchers on the computer so my typing could keep up with my thinking. I was comforted being near words, even if I was just writing love stories about Mickey Mouse.

I knew telling stories was in my future, or at least learning how to help other people unlock theirs. I was always interested in what stories were told and who had the opportunity to tell them. I knew I wanted to teach; it was a medium for storytelling. I also knew I wanted to act.

At eighteen, I decided I could combine these interests to become a sign language teacher. This plan was diverted when I realized my college did not have a sign language program. That information would have been helpful to learn from my high school guidance counselor, but he was too busy telling me that Jewish girls should learn to cook, take their “pretty pills,” and not worry so much about a job because the focus should be on finding a husband. And instead of replying with what I really thought (thanks to the class on feminism I was taking), I just ignored his terrible advice, applied to college without knowing the nuances, and accidentally ended up in a great school—without my major.

It wasn't the last time I missed the opportunity to say what I was thinking, but as my responsibilities grew, so did my voice. I did become a teacher, of both English and theater, and spent my days doing exactly what I had hoped to do—helping people use words to communicate. I met with administrators to fight for more inclusive texts to be read. I started clubs to allow students new opportunities to write and perform. I partnered with colleagues to update the curriculum so it was more student-centered. Every decision I made was around empowering people to tell their stories—to speak their truths.

After thirty years of relying on words, teaching them every day, I learned my firstborn might never use them. In fact, my daughter changed my entire life with just three words. *Cri du chat*. In French, it means “cry of the cat.” In medical school, it means a genetic disorder caused by a chromosomal deletion. In the doctor's office, it means tests and therapies. But at the kitchen table, it means my daughter. Our Jordan.

When you are told your child may never walk or talk, you need to redefine everything you know about communication. You search for new ways to describe despair. You find experts to help you expand possibilities. You become trained to find words in new places. You unearth that sign language pamphlet from the nineties to access a starting point. And your ways to communicate expand. You find new meaning behind her smiles, her dance moves, and her kisses. You see

joy with her pointing and her body language. And you revel in her hand signs for *Mama* and *more*.

As Jordan's communication grows, so does mine. I learn to speak up where I never previously did. I weave through implicit biases to advocate for my child. I fight to understand what ableism is and how to eradicate it. I learn how to use my spoken words to amplify the other ways there are to communicate. And my words form questions: Does she understand us? What will her future look like? Will she grow up in a more tolerant society? Will my words make a difference? The answer is: I don't know.

And for the woman who whispered her words, who was afraid to confront, who was worried she would appear combative if she really spoke ... she has found something more powerful. Something that encapsulates pride and fear, strength and temerity, sadness and joy, love and comfort: to be a mother and learn there are ways to listen to your child who might not speak.

And when they create the word for that, let me know.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT **LOVING YOU BIG**

Loving You Big is most often described as “vulnerable,” “thoughtful,” “easy to read,” and “inspiring.”

Here are some comments from readers:

- “I can feel every emotion and can relate to every thought.”
- “When I finish crying, I start laughing, and then start crying again.”
- “It made me think about how I approach the world around me and what I want to do differently.”
- “I am reflecting on my own choices as a parent.”
- “Leah challenges her reader to look at the world differently, to check our own ‘ableism’ biases, and to simply love big!”

“In her beautiful and inspiring memoir, Leah Moore, mother of a child with a rare chromosomal disorder, invites us into her journey as they beat the predictions with bravery, vulnerability, and above all, humor.”

– Nicola Wheir, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Nanny Diaries*

“The only universal truth about parenting is that none of us are getting out unscathed. There’s going to be sobbing, but there will also be cake. Just focus on the cake. In her charming story of family and hope, Leah Moore appears to have figured that all out, choosing daily to meet her challenges with a hum rather than sob...and a robust collection of wigs. If there’s any secret to parenting, that would be it: Just keep humming.*”

– Jeni Decker, author of *I Wish I Were Engulfed in Flames: My Insane Life Raising Two Boys With Autism*

*Wigs optional

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT **LOVING YOU BIG**

“An intimate portrait of boundless parental love and resilience told with humor, wit, and a deep understanding of our humanity. This extraordinary story will grab your heart and squeeze it. And you will be transformed by it.”

- Diana Kupershmit,
author of *Emma's Laugh*

“With the perspective of an educator, the passion of an activist, and the fierce love of a mother, Moore shares her experiences raising a daughter with cri du chat alongside her other children with their own special needs. With heart and humor, insight and intelligence, Moore poignantly takes the reader along with her on a journey from Jordan's diagnosis to overcoming challenges to reaching milestones and beyond. Moore also advances a much-needed conversation about our “ableist” society from both institutional and personal angles. By giving voice to the voiceless, Moore has provided a gift to readers who can relate to her experiences firsthand as well as those who can not. This book touched me deeply, and I didn't want to put it down.”

- Susie Orman Schnall, author of
The Subway Girls and
We Came Here to Shine

LOVING YOU BIG is perfect for fans of...

Raising a Rare Girl by Heather Lanier

Broken (in the best possible way) by Jenny Lawson

I Miss You When I Blink by Mary Laura Philpott

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR **LOVING YOU BIG**

- 1** Leah introduces her story with the tension of the life she imagined she would live and the reality of her circumstances. Has there been a time where you had to negotiate your own planned vs. lived circumstances? What supported you throughout this process?
- 2** There is an underlying struggle in the memoir to create time for self-care. Which of her struggles could you identify with and what strategies could you use in your own life?
- 3** How would you describe Leah's understanding of implicit biases as they pertain to individuals with disabilities? What is she advocating for within our society?
- 4** Khalil Gibran's quote about sorrow and joy is referenced in the text. "Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed." How does the Moore family try to find a balance between their own sorrow and joy? How does this connect to your own life?
- 5** The memoir is structured in a series of vignettes, a shorter passage relying on a snapshot in time, broken up over three key sections: meeting the family, adjusting to the new normal, and becoming an advocate. Did the structure connect to your engagement as a reader? Why or why not?

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR **LOVING YOU BIG**

6

Leah discusses her own experiences learning to find her voice, not only to speak up for her daughter Jordan but also to look towards larger societal issues about the treatment of individuals with disabilities. How does reading about her journey invite you to reexamine your own voice in society? Where are there spaces where you believe more change is necessary?

7

Coined by children's author Dianna Hutts Aston in *A Beetle Is Shy*, the third section of the memoir focuses on "Ladybug Warriors." What is a "ladybug warrior?" Where have you encountered your own "ladybug warriors?" In what ways have you been a "ladybug warrior" for someone else?

8

Leah discusses the importance of mental health support. She uses writing as a tool to process the odyssey of emotions she faces. What is something you use in your life for self-regulation? What is something you wish you had more time for?

9

After reading this memoir, how would you finish this sentence: Before I read *Loving You Big*, I used to think "X," but now I think "Y."

10

What are you "loving big" right now?

HOSTING INSPIRATION FOR YOUR LOVING YOU BIG BOOK CLUB

In addition to his kindness, sense of humor, and intelligence, Leah also married Zac for his cooking skills. Invite the taste of Texas into your home with his mom's famous salsa recipe.

Mama Rose's Salsa

2 cans Rotel
½ a red onion
1 fresh jalapeño
2 handfuls of cilantro
Salt to taste
Blend. Blend. Blend.

Eat with chips of your liking.

Or you can use Leah's hosting tactic:

Wear your favorite pair of fancy sweatpants, sit on the couch under a blanket, and eat some delicious chocolate.

(Sharing optional.)

Are you interested in having Leah join your conversation?

Invite her to a Zoom meeting by filling out [this form](#).

Do you have a story you have always wanted to tell and need some support to write it?

Email Leah at lovingyoubig@gmail.com to learn more about her “Writing to Remember” course. (Designed for writers of all levels!)

BONUS FEATURES

Support your local bookstore!

Find your local book seller at bookshop.org, request enough copies for your book club, and have the bookstore host an evening with the author.

LOVING YOU BIG is also available through [Amazon](#), [Target](#), [Barnes & Noble](#).

A portion of the proceeds are donated to

Inclusion Matters by Shane's Inspiration

dedicated to building adaptive playgrounds.

Want to know more about the family behind LOVING YOU BIG?



Read the Forbes article about LOVING YOU BIG



Read more of Leah's writing



Watch the documentary about Jordan & Cri du Chat

Meet Jordan!



