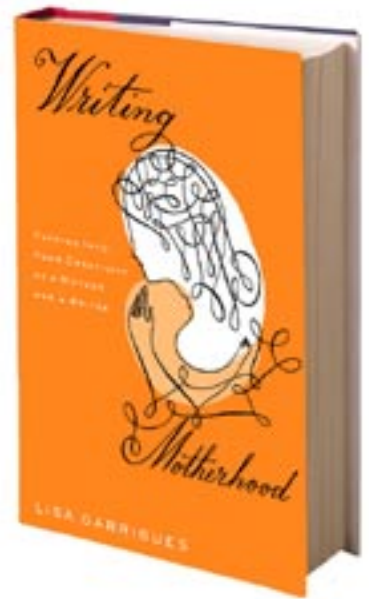


# WRITING MOTHERHOOD TIPS FOR BOOKCLUBS

*Writing Motherhood* is not your typical book club fare, nor is it a book only for aspiring writers. Part memoir, part instruction manual, the book addresses many important, often provocative concerns relevant to all mothers. Whether you dream of becoming a published author or shudder at the thought of writing anything more than a grocery list, in *Writing Motherhood* you will find many moments you recognize from your own life. As the questions below indicate, the book promises to stimulate a lively discussion that's unlike anything your book club has previously experienced.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the Foreword to *Writing Motherhood*, Lisa lists all the obstacles that have prevented her from writing: dishes, diapers, dirty laundry, just plain doubt. What obstacles in your life—real or imagined—keep you from pursuing a dream: learning a craft, studying a musical instrument, taking dance lessons, writing for publication, running a marathon? (*Foreword: Rocks in the River*, page xiii)
2. Of all the “Building Blocks” of *Writing Motherhood*, Lisa struggles most with the Time Out. Why do you think it's so hard for mothers to take time for themselves? How often do you take a Time Out? As a group, can you generate your own list of restorative ways to spend your Time Out? (*Building Block #6: The Time Out*, page 50)
3. Women today must reinvent the role of mother since few of us follow in the footsteps of our mothers and grandmothers. What are some of the choices you have made as a parent—not just about how you raise your children but also about how you became a mother: whether to battle infertility or adopt; raise a family alone or with a partner; keep your job or put your career on hold? In what way is your experience of motherhood different from that of your mother's generation? (*In the Beginning—Taking Your First Steps*, page 65)
4. The first thing Lisa tells her students is to throw away the rules of writing because rules bind our imagination, constrain our creativity, and muffle our voices. Our children,

however, live much of their lives according to rules—rules that are imposed in the classroom, in the cafeteria, on the playing field. How do rules function in your household? Which rules are non-negotiable? How have the rules changed as your children have grown older? (*Throw Away the Rules*, page 67)

5. “I can tell you that the only thing as bad as being a child who feels left out is being the parent of a child who feels left out.” Do you agree with Lisa’s statement? Think of a time your child felt left out. How did he or she react? What did you do? Did the experience remind you of a time you may have felt left out as a child? (*Left Out*, page 160)
6. When Lisa describes herself at nineteen, meeting the man she would eventually marry, she says, “Of all the things I wondered [about Mark], it never so much as occurred to me to consider the kind of father he would be.” When you first met your partner, did you ever consider the kind of parent he or she would be? What are your partner’s most endearing qualities as a parent? Most aggravating? Are your parenting styles similar or very different? How has your relationship changed since you became parents? (*Fathers—or Marriage after Motherhood*, page 169)
7. Lisa’s mother “no longer walks; she shuffles,” slowed down not so much by age as by Alzheimer’s. Their roles have reversed, as Lisa has begun to mother her mother. In what way has your relationship with your mother changed over the years? Have you begun to parent her? Whether or not your mother is still living, how has she influenced the way you are now raising your own children? (*Mothering Our Mothers*, page 180)
8. Lisa describes mothers as “tribal packhorses,” weighed down by the physical and metaphorical things we carry. Has your life become more cluttered since you became a parent? Are your days of traveling light long gone? What do you carry with you now that you didn’t carry with you before you had children? (*The Things We Carry*, page 202)
9. “Privacy is protective; it is about honoring what is sacred. Secrecy is insidious; it is about burying what is true.” Do you agree with the distinction that Lisa makes between the two? How do you decide what to tell your children about your life? What do you believe is best kept hidden behind closed doors? How do you feel as your children begin to close the door in order to protect their privacy? (*Closed Doors*, page 223)

10. Lisa recounts a time she was a “Bad Mother,” having left her sick daughter to fend for herself. Think of a time you slipped up as a mother—lost your temper, said *no* for no reason, forgot to pick your child up after school. Just for fun, vote on the most outrageous or inexcusable bad mothering moment. (*Good Enough*, page 239)

## WAYS TO ENRICH YOUR EXPERIENCE OF WRITING MOTHERHOOD

- Your book club may want to read *Writing Motherhood* in September, when children are back in school and mothers are ready to focus more on themselves. Or you could read the book at the end of the year, when you are looking for a different book club experience.
- See if you can find one of your old diaries or journals from before you became a mother. Bring it along to book club—not to read aloud but as a testament to a time in your life when writing helped you find your way.
- In the spirit of the writers who frequented the Paris cafes in the 1920s, consider holding this month’s book club in a café or coffee shop. Or refer to page 47 of *Writing Motherhood* for other fun places to meet.
- Bring along a notebook or paper and pen so your group can sample some of the writing invitations in *Writing Motherhood*. Choose one of the activities described in *Games Writers Play* on page 295. If you have time for more, pick a writing start from the Appendix on page 305. Randomly choose a number 1 to 99 and find the corresponding writing start on the list.
- Invite Lisa Garrigues to talk on the telephone to your book club of eight members or more. You can email the author at [lisa@writingmotherhood.com](mailto:lisa@writingmotherhood.com).