

## My Little Red Book Reading Group Guide

- 1) Which story speaks the most to you? Why? What story most closely resembles your own first period experience? What story is furthest from your own experience?
- 2) Why do you think that the taboo surrounding menstruation has endured when so many others have already disappeared? In which stories is it most present? What can be done to end this taboo?
- 3) Contributor Michele Jaffe (“Going to X-tremes”) writes that how a girl deals with her first period says a lot about her character and about the woman she will become. Pick a story (some good ones for this exercise are “My Second First Period,” “Andy Roddick’s Serve,” “I Know You Are Not There, God. It’s Me, Kate,” and “Operation Menstruation!”) and discuss how the contributor’s reaction to her first period sheds light on who she is. Do you think that is true for your own experience?
- 4) The oldest contribution for *My Little Red Book* is from 1916 and the newest is from 2007. How have times changed in terms of attitude towards menstruation?
- 5) Using Gloria Steinem’s essay “If Men Could Menstruate” as a springboard for discussion, pick a story and imagine how it would have happened differently had the contributor been a man.
- 6) Why do we have so many euphemisms for menstruation? What is your favorite?
- 7) Discuss how the theme of gain being coupled with loss appears in these stories and its relevance to other milestone events in life.
- 8) Joyce Maynard begins her story “Out of the Closet” by discussing how she was criticized for being “shameless.” Why do you think people use this word as a critique? Is being shameless such a bad thing? At the same time, are there still subjects that are meant to be left untouched and unspoken?
- 9) Some of the contributors express the sense that their mothers just don’t get it. Will that ever change? On the flip side, in stories by mothers, for example, “Fear of Fourteen” and “Simple as Salt,” mothers work hard to make sure their daughters’ first-period experiences are better than their own. How do you wish your mother had reacted? If you have a daughter, how did (will) you prepare her for her first period? How do you plan to mark the occasion?
- 10) If you could have a do-over for your first period, what would you have liked to be different?
- 11) Several of the stories, most notably “Simple as Salt” and “I Know You Are Not There, God. It’s Me, Kate,” challenge the common idea that menarche is the transition point from girlhood to womanhood. Do you agree? What were the milestones in your own life that you feel transitioned you from childhood to adulthood?
- 12) Compare how women in different cultures experience their periods.
- 13) How do girls’ relationships with their dads change after menarche? Jenni Deslandes’ “Down Under” provides one example. Did your relationship with your dad change?

14) What would be the most embarrassing way you could imagine to get your first period?

15) What perspectives are missing from the collection?

16) Imagine you are your favorite female character in literature or history, and write about a first period from her perspective. A few fun ones might be Joan of Arc, Georgia Nicholson (from *Full Frontal Snogging*), Harriet Tubman, Hermione Granger, Hillary Clinton, and Jane Austen. You are encouraged to submit the story to the [www.mylittleredbook.net](http://www.mylittleredbook.net) web site.

17) Looking at today's sanitary supply ads, is the media solving or perpetuating a taboo? Consider one recent campaign: "Mother Nature calls it your 'monthly gift,' but your period is more like a curse when you need to wear backup too." At the other end of the spectrum is the "Period Dance" video which is on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-4APMv2QKo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-4APMv2QKo). Do companies have a responsibility to target their ads a certain way?

18) Some birth control pills have made menstruation an optional part of womanhood. Will this lead us to look at womanhood in a different way? Should we keep our periods? Why?