The Short-Story-Collection Book Club Kit

Run a book club for the book with ten beginnings and ten endings - story-by-story scorecards, per-story rating pages, favourites ballots, a rank-the-stories finale, 24 theme-across-stories debate cards, and a ready-made discussion guide for Tales from the Clockwork Garden

Free sample - four real pages from the kit: the Host's Quick-Start Guide (p.3), the full Per-Story Rating Page (p.8), the Story-by-Story Scorecard (p.10) and the complete 'Roses in February' discussion page (p.22). Enough to run a real first-story discussion tonight. Print at 100% on US Letter or A4.

The Host's Quick-Start Guide (kit p.3)

How a collection night flows - the whole session on one page, written for the kit's main format: one collection, discussed in one night. The Story-a-Week variant is on kit p.4.

1. Settle & map the room (first 10 min). Drinks, seats, and the Collection Map (p.7) on the table where everyone can see it. The host reads the story titles aloud in the book's order - hearing the whole shape of the collection out loud, before any verdicts, is the night's quiet foundation.

2. The Finished-Which-Stories? check (2 min). Run the protocol on p.5: who finished all of them, who finished which ones, who skipped what and why. Write it on the Session Planner (p.6). This takes two minutes and protects every later vote: ballots are only counted for stories the voter actually read.

3. Story by story, quickly (25-35 min). Work down the Collection Map in the book's order. For each story: sixty seconds of silent scoring on the Story-by-Story Scorecard (p.10), then two minutes of talk - best line, sharpest disagreement, one score defended. Do not debate the ranking yet; capture the scores while the stories are still separate. Members use their Per-Story Rating Pages (pp.8-9), filled in while reading, as their evidence.

4. The favourites ballot (10 min). Ballots out (p.12). Members vote only in categories for stories they read. The host tallies aloud - read the near-misses out too; a story that loses Favourite by one vote has earned its minute. Ballot categories: Favourite Story - Best Opening - Best Ending - Best Character in Any Story - Most Surprising Story - The One I'd Press on a Stranger - Most Underrated Story.

5. The debate cards (15-20 min). Play two or three Theme-Across-Stories Debate Cards (pp.15-20) chosen for this collection - a linked collection wants the Threads & Echoes set; an unrelated-story collection wants Craft, Length & Form and The Verdicts. This is the across-stories conversation no novel night ever gets to have.

6. Rank the stories - the finale (10 min). The Rank the Stories page (p.13) comes out last, and only last. The club builds one shared ranking from the night's scores, ballots and arguments - not an average; a negotiated order the room will sign. Ties are settled by re-reading one opening line each, aloud.

7. Close & log (5 min). The club writes its six-word verdict for the collection on the Collection Shelf Log (p.14), picks next month's book, and the host files the planner, scorecard and ranking together. In six months, those three pages are the club's memory of the book.

The host's opening words (printed - read them word for word if you like):

"Tonight is a collection, so tonight works differently. We'll take the stories one at a time first - scores before arguments - then we'll vote our favourites, argue about what connects them, and finish by ranking the lot, together, in order. If you didn't finish every story, you're still fully in: vote on the ones you read, and say so proudly when you pass on the ones you didn't. First question is never 'did you finish it?' It's 'which story is still living in your head?'"

Host rules:

Scores before ranking. A ranking built before the scores is just the loudest reader's taste with a title. - Protect the skipped story. Somebody's skipped story is somebody else's favourite - both facts get their minute. - End with the ranking on paper. A collection night that doesn't write the order down will re-argue it from scratch next month.

Per-Story Rating Page - The Full Page (kit p.8)

One full page per story, filled in while reading or in the first quiet minutes of the night - each member's evidence file for the scorecard round, the ballot and the ranking. Reprint per story.

Collection: _____ Story title: _____ Story # ___ of ___ Author (anthologies): _____
Pages: _____ Date read: _____

First reaction, written before anything else on this page - in one sentence, what did this story leave you holding?

The story in brief (your words, no blurb-copying): who, where, and what changes?

Opening: the first line / first scene - did it hook you, and how fast? Opening score: ___ / 10

People: the character who stayed with you - and why them and not the others:

Place & world: where does it live, and could it happen anywhere else?

The turn: the moment the story changed direction or changed meaning:

Ending: [ ] Earned [ ] Rushed [ ] Perfect stop [ ] One page too long [ ] One page too short - because: Ending score: ___ / 10

Emotion: the strongest feeling, named plainly - and where it hit (scene/line):

Craft: one thing the writing does brilliantly / one thing that wobbles:

A line worth reading aloud tonight (page: ___):

Scores: Character ___/10 - Place & World ___/10 - Plot & Turn ___/10 - Ending ___/10 - Emotion ___/10 - Craft ___/10 - STORY TOTAL: ___ / 60
Verdicts: Would you reread it? [ ] Yes [ ] No [ ] In a year - Would you press it on a stranger? [ ] Yes - this one first - My one-line review for the Shelf Log:

Bring this page to the night. Your scores on p.10 should match the totals here - if they don't by the end of the argument, change them in pen and note why. Changed scores are the discussion working.

Story-by-Story Scorecard - The Whole Collection at a Glance (kit p.10)

The night's central sheet: every story, every score, one visible table. Filled in live during Quick-Start step 3; it is the evidence base for the ballot, the debate and the ranking.

Collection: _____ Date: _____ Members scoring tonight: _____

Story (in book order)	Char.	World	Plot & Turn	Ending	Emotion	Craft	Avg /60	Read by

Score silently first (60 seconds per story), then talk. Averages are written only after each member has defended - or changed - one score.

Highest average: _____ Lowest average: _____

Widest disagreement (biggest gap between members on one story): _____ - that story gets the first debate card.

The story whose score moved most during discussion: _____ From ___ to ___ - moved by (whose argument): _____

Coverage check: any story scored by fewer than half the room is marked and cannot win Favourite outright - it goes to a runoff described on p.12. Twelve rows cover most collections; print twice for longer anthologies. Keep this sheet: in the ranking finale (p.13), any order that flatly contradicts it needs a stated reason.

"Roses in February" - Discussion Guide (kit p.22)

The complete ready-made discussion page for Story 1 of Tales from the Clockwork Garden by A. R. Calloway. Orientation and questions are drawn only from the story itself.

Orientation

In February snow, Mira Solace smells roses before she reaches her shop: every bush along the south wall has come into full summer bloom overnight, warm to the touch, because - Gran explains, as if reporting late post - the garden lost time in the night and had to spend it somewhere. With a hard frost returning that night, they cut the roses and fill the shop with them, and Mira tells her first keeping-lie ("my grandmother's glasshouse") to Mrs. Prior and the town. Alone that evening, Mira finds the shop's regulator forty seconds slow, asks Gran how long she has been covering for the garden, hears that it spends more as the keeper gets older - "sixty years I have kept it" - and begins, in pencil at the back of her repair ledger, a second set of accounts: "Garden. One hour, February. See roses."

1. The story's magic arrives as a smell on the shop steps, before any explanation. What does opening on sensation rather than rules do to how we accept the garden's impossible behaviour for the rest of the collection?
2. Gran's rule is practical, not mystical: cut the roses or lose them by morning. How does the story use ordinary competent work - cutting, dividing, arranging - to make the miraculous believable?
3. "A house can hide roses. A shop must explain them, which is a different art." What exactly is the art Mira is learning in this story, and where do we see her discover she is good at it?
4. * The glasshouse lie: Mira is "astonished at the smoothness of it." Is the lie kind, necessary, corrupting - or all three in proportions the club should argue out? Who is it told for: the town, Gran, the garden, or Mira herself?
5. Mrs. Prior leaves with a cream rose and the whole town is "bewildered and pleased." What does the story suggest a community gains from a small, shared, unexplained pleasure - and what does it cost the one person who does know?
6. Mira counts: it is "her trade; she couldn't help it." How does the story set Mira's counting (forty seconds, one hour, sixty years) against Gran's covering? Which habit is the keeping actually made of?
7. Gran says the garden "chooses who helps it... It chose me when I was twenty-one." By the end of this story, what evidence is there that a new choosing has begun - and does Mira recognise it yet?
8. Judged purely as an opener (debate Card B1): what does this story promise the collection will be, teach us about how to read it, and leave deliberately unexplained?

Scorecard prompt

Before moving on: score the story on p.10, then each member names the exact moment the story won them (or failed to) - the smell on the steps, the sink full of roses, and the ledger entry are the usual three candidates. Note the split. Best debate cards for this story: A1 (the thread) - B1 (the door the book opens).

This free sample holds four real pages of The Short-Story-Collection Book Club Kit (28 pages: a 7-page host's guide, 7 core printables - rating pages, scorecards, favourites ballots, the Rank the Stories finale, the Collection Shelf Log - 24 theme-across-stories debate cards in 6 sets with 72 debate questions, and a complete 7-page ready-made discussion guide to Tales from the Clockwork Garden - US Letter, A4 and tablet editions). All live at pagelyra.vercel.app