



# Discussion Guides

## 2008-2009 Peach Award Nominees

### **Absolutely, Positively Not by David LaRochelle**

1. Steven has several secrets, including square dancing with his mother. Do you have secrets? Why do you keep them as secrets?
2. What do you think of Trent Beachum's guidelines for creating a "healthy" interest in girls? Do you think his advice can be effective?
3. What do you think of the rubber band fad? Have you ever started or tried to start a fad?
4. Steven fails his driver's license exam a couple of times. What was your driving test(s) like?
5. Steven brings a dog to the school dance. Why do you think he did this? How would your friends, classmates, teachers react?
6. What stereotypes does Steven deal with in coming to terms with his sexuality?
7. Why do you think Steven decided to come out to his parents?
8. Does your school have a Gay/Straight Alliance? Do you think a club like this would help Steven? Why or why not?
9. What does Superman represent in the novel?
10. What do you think the future holds for Steven now that he is absolutely, positively gay and okay with who he is?

### **Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie**

1. The *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* shows a different side of American Indian life than do many other books. What did you learn about Indians from it?
2. Why does Alexie call his book the diary of a "part-time" Indian?
3. On his reservation, Alexie's main character is known as "Junior." But when he switches to a new high school, Reardan, people call him by his formal name, Arnold. "I felt like two different people inside of one body," he says. Do you think Junior/Arnold was just talking about his name? Or did he feel split in other ways, too?
4. Arnold misses his best friend, Rowdy, after he starts his new school. But Rowdy doesn't seem to want to join him there. How do Arnold's and Rowdy's views of the reservation – and their own lives – differ? What do you think Alexie is trying to show you through those differences?
5. At his new school, Reardan, Arnold gets to know a book-lover named Gordy, who says that "life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community." How does this idea relate to Arnold's life?
6. Arnold tells Gordy that some Indians taunt him: "They call me an apple because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside." What did they mean? Did their comment describe Arnold accurately?
7. What's the purpose of the humor in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*? Why does Alexie use it when Arnold is clearly angry about a lot of things?

8. Arnold's math teacher at Wellpinit High School, Mr. P, tells him that the teachers at the school used to beat the Indians with a stick: "That's how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child." What did he mean?
9. Alexie uses a racial slur (the "n" word) and strong language (the "f" word) in a joke on page 64. He repeated the words in a talk at an Illinois high school, and some students walked out. Alexie apologized to anyone he had offended but stood by his use of the words in his novel "because that was what was said. And to blunt the hatred of that insult blunts the incredible obstacles my character had to face," a newspaper reported. ("Author Defends Using Slur, but Apologizes to Students," by Melissa Jenco, Daily Herald of Arlington Heights, IL, October 6, 2007.) Do you agree with Alexie that in order to make his point, he had to use words that would offend some people? How do these words relate to the rest of the novel?
10. What did you think of Ellen Forney's pictures for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*? What is their purpose in the book? Do they provide a mirror for the text, reflecting back only what you read on the page? Or do they expand it? How?
11. Arnold falls in love with Penelope, a beautiful white student. In Greek mythology, Penelope married Odysseus, the hero of Homer's *The Odyssey*. If you've read about Penelope in that book or others, how does she resemble the student in this novel?

From One Minute Book Reviews, <http://oneminutebookreviews.wordpress.com/2008/01/16/a-totally-unauthorized-reading-group-guide-to-sherman-alexie%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98the-absolutely-true-diary-of-a-part-time-indian%E2%80%99/>

### **American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang**

1. American Born Chinese is the first graphic novel to win the Printz Award and be a finalist for the National Book Award. Why do you think it was picked for these awards and honors? Would you have chosen it? Explain.
2. Graphic novels appeal to a variety of people. There are a variety of graphic novel genres such as fantasy, super-hero, non-fiction, etc. Have you read graphic novels in the past? How did American Born Chinese compare? Graphically speaking what appealed to you? What did not?
3. Did you find the graphic novel an effective way for Yang to tell his story?
4. Yang uses humor to make light of experiences that are not so humorous for the immigrants that experience them. Often when reading we laugh at painful experiences of the characters. Have you or anyone you've known had experiences that were funny to others, but very painful to you? If possible, explain. Do you think Yang used the technique of humor appropriately?
5. What can be learned from the Monkey King and American Born Chinese?
6. Yang uses a television show to tell Chin-Kee's story. Why do you think he does this? Was it effective? Why?
7. The Monkey King chooses to be stuck in the mountain of rocks for 500 years, to escape he must return to his "true form." How do the other characters experience this in American Born Chinese? Have you experienced a similar situation in your life?
8. Wei-Chen's transformer robot monkey symbolizes so much in the graphic novel. How do the characters in American Born Chinese "transform" themselves for American society? Do you "transform" yourselves? Why?

From:

[http://www.holmen.k12.wi.us/se3bin/clientgenie.cgi?schoolname=school314&statusFlag=goGenie&geniesite=227&myButton=g5plugin&db=g227\\_b4222](http://www.holmen.k12.wi.us/se3bin/clientgenie.cgi?schoolname=school314&statusFlag=goGenie&geniesite=227&myButton=g5plugin&db=g227_b4222)

### **Boot Camp by Todd Strasser**

1. What did you enjoy about this book?
2. What have you read that is similar to this book?
3. What are some of the major themes of this book?
4. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
5. Who was your favorite character? What did you appreciate about him/her?
6. Consider the main character: what does he or she believe in? What is he or she willing to fight for?
7. At the end of the book, do you feel hope for the characters?
8. What is stronger in the book: plot or character development? Why? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
9. Have you ever experienced anything similar to the action of this novel?
10. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
11. What are your concerns about this book?
12. How did you feel about the main character?
13. What are the most important relationships in the book?
14. What makes a minor character memorable?
15. What are the most revealing scenes?
16. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
17. What did you think of the style of the writer?
18. Was the story credible? The characters credible?
19. Did you find any flaws in the book?
20. Compare the hardcover and paperback covers. Which one do you like better? Why?

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### **The Boyfriend List by E. Lockhart**

1. Did E. Lockhart emphasize any specific themes throughout *The Boyfriend List*? What do you think E. Lockhart is trying to explain with this theme?
2. What was unique about the setting of *The Boyfriend List* and how did it affect the storyline?
3. Could you relate to any of the characters? If so, which ones and why?
4. How do characters change or learn throughout *The Boyfriend List*? What events caused these changes? Have you or someone you know experienced the same thing?
5. How does *The Boyfriend List* reveal E. Lockhart's own perspectives about people and the world? For a lively discussion, describe why you think E. Lockhart is liberal or conservative.
6. Did certain parts of *The Boyfriend List* affect you emotionally? Why did it evoke those emotions?
7. Did E. Lockhart's point of view on things lend new perspective to your own view of the world?  
Did E. Lockhart make persuasive arguments in *The Boyfriend List*? Did *The Boyfriend List* change or reinforce your opinion on the subject?
8. What did you learn from *The Boyfriend List*?
9. How does E. Lockhart present the information and did you enjoy it?
10. How is E. Lockhart biased within *The Boyfriend List*? Is there a political slant to what is being discussed and how does it impact the book?
11. What, if anything, does *The Boyfriend List* make you want to read next? Why?

Discussion Questions from the Reader's Circle edition of the novel:

### **Copper Sun by Sharon Draper**

1. Copper Sun is a work of historical fiction. How does the blending of history and fiction make for a successful story? Which elements are purely fictional? Which elements are basically historical? Why does learning history through fiction make the story more memorable? How does this method of telling the story affect the reader's response?
2. The very first page, just before chapter one, tells of a slave sale and how it must feel to be fifteen years old, stripped naked, and standing on the auction block. Describe the feelings and fears of the girl being sold. What predictions can the reader make about the girl and the rest of the story?
3. As you first meet Amari, even though she lives in the Africa of two hundred years ago, how is she like many fifteen-year-old girls today? How is she different? What strengths do you find in her family and home life? What negatives do you observe?
4. How is the relationship between Besa and Amari similar to teen relationships today? How is it different? Describe how Amari feels about him. What predictions can you make about their future together?
5. Describe the relationship between Amari and her parents, between Amari and her little brother Kwasi. How does the strength of her family make a difference in her life?
6. What do you know of the village of Ziavi from the descriptions given in the text? How would you describe the social structure, family structure, and cultural structure of the community? How did the custom of graciousness to guests become a death sentence for the town? Explain why the Ashanti helped the European killers.
7. Besa's great skill and source of pleasure is his drum playing. The people of the village love music and singing and dancing and self-expression. Explore the importance of artistic influences on individuals as well as groups of people. How can self-expression be used as a tool for helping or healing?
8. Amari's parents are killed, along with most of the people in her village. How do you think you would react in the same situation? What options does Amari have? What option does Tirza choose and why? What option does Kwadzo choose and why? Why does Amari continue on? Describe what you think Amari is thinking as they are forced to walk across the countryside.
9. Describe the horrors of Cape Coast Castle, the Door of No Return, and the branding on the beach. How does Amari survive? What necessary survival techniques would you have to develop to survive those experiences?
10. Amari makes friends with people who help her survive, who give her the strength she needs at a crucial time in her life. Describe her relationship with Afi, and explain long range and short range influence of Afi on Amari's life.
11. Describe the Middle Passage as described in the novel. What is it about human beings that makes one person mistreat another? What is about humans that makes us survive in spite of it?
12. Why do you think Bill decides to teach Amari English? What does this tell you about him? Why is learning the language a powerful tool for Amari?
13. Describe Amari's feelings as she is sold. What does she NOT know about her future that the reader probably does know? What would you have done in the same situation?
14. Discuss the character of Polly and how she comes across as we first meet her. What kind of life has she had? How does her past explain her attitudes? What advantages does Polly have in the society and in the story?
15. Discuss the first meeting between Polly and Amari. Why is this part of the story told from Polly's point of view?

16. How do Teenie and Tidbit and Hushpuppy add color and flavor to life on the plantation? What are their attitudes about being slaves? Give specific examples.
17. Discuss the character of Clay and his complicated feelings for Amari. Does he have any redeeming qualities, or is he purely a negative character? What about Clay's father? Does he have any redeeming qualities, or is he purely a negative character?
18. Explain the title of the novel. Why does the title have more than one possible interpretation? Find several examples of reference to "copper sun" within the story.
19. Discuss the gradual developing of the relationship between Polly and Amari. How is each girl unique? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? What does each girl offer that the other needs? What makes a friendship?
20. How is Mrs. Derby almost like a slave herself? What predictions did you make about Mrs. Derby and Noah? What foreshadowing is given to prepare the reader for what happens?
21. Why would Mr. Derby be socially and legally justified by what he did to Noah and the baby? Why didn't Dr. Hoskins speak up? Why is tragedy more memorable and more powerful than happiness in a novel?
22. What was the overall effect of the gator bait scene? How do you think Tidbit felt when he was in the water? How do you think his mother felt? Amari tried to object, but endangered Tidbit by doing so. How do you think she felt?
23. Why didn't more slaves rise up and protest or fight back? What social and cultural pieces were in place to prevent it?
24. Discuss the argument between Amari and Polly over whether to go north or go south. Why was it extremely unusual to choose a southern route? What does this show about Amari's personality?
25. On the journey we find out more about Polly's family and her background. How did Polly's parents and her relationship with them shape the person that Polly became?
26. Describe the difficulties of traveling by night, all alone, with no food and no real guarantee that the place you are heading to really exists. How would you have survived the trip? What seemed to be the most difficult for the travelers?
27. What does Amari learn about herself, her past and her future through her reunion with Besa?
28. How do you think Amari, Polly, and Tidbit felt when they finally reached their destination? What was disappointing about the place when they finally saw it? What was reassuring?
29. What predictions can you make about Amari in the next five years? Will the three of them still be together or will Polly have gone off on her own? How has Amari grown and changed?
30. What did you learn about Africa, the middle passage, slavery, and African-American history that you did not know before? How has it changed your thinking, if any?

From <http://sharondraper.com/lessonsdetail.asp?lesson=12>

### **Epic by Conor Kostick**

1. Did Conor Kostick emphasize any specific themes throughout Epic? What do you think Conor Kostick is trying to explain with this theme?
2. What was unique about the setting of Epic and how did it affect the storyline?

3. Could you relate to any of the characters? If so, which ones and why?
4. How do characters change or learn throughout *Epic*? What events caused these changes? Have you or someone you know experienced the same thing?
5. How does *Epic* reveal Conor Kostick's own perspectives about people and the world? For a lively discussion, describe why you think Conor Kostick is liberal or conservative.
6. Did certain parts of *Epic* affect you emotionally? Why did it evoke those emotions?
7. Did Conor Kostick's point of view on things lend new perspective to your own view of the world?

From: [http://muskokalakeslibrary.zbookclub.com/book\\_finders/0670061794-epic-conor-kostick](http://muskokalakeslibrary.zbookclub.com/book_finders/0670061794-epic-conor-kostick)

### **Gingerbread by Rachel Cohn**

1. Did Rachel Cohn emphasize any specific themes throughout *Gingerbread*? What do you think Cohn is trying to explain with this theme?
2. What was unique about the setting of *Gingerbread* and how did it affect the storyline?
3. Could you relate to any of the characters? If so, which ones and why?
4. How does Cyd change or learn throughout *Gingerbread*? What events caused these changes? Have you or someone you know undergone a similar transformation?
5. How does *Gingerbread* reveal Rachel Cohn's own perspectives about people and the world? For a lively discussion, describe why you think Cohn is liberal or conservative.
6. Did certain parts of *Gingerbread* affect you emotionally? Why did it evoke those emotions?
7. Did Rachel Cohn's point of view on things lend new perspective to your own view of the world?

### **Impulse by Ellen Hopkins**

1. What did you enjoy about this book?
2. What have you read that is similar to this book?
3. What are some of the major themes of this book?
4. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
5. Who was your favorite character? What did you appreciate about him/her?
6. Consider the main character: what does he or she believe in? What is he or she willing to fight for?
7. At the end of the book, do you feel hope for the characters?
8. What is stronger in the book: plot or character development? Why? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
9. Have you ever experienced anything similar to the action of this novel?
10. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
11. What are your concerns about this book?
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13. What are the most important relationships in the book?
14. What makes a minor character memorable?
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16. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
17. What did you think of the style of the writer?
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<http://www.multicolib.org/talk/universalquestions.html>

### **Keturah and Lord Death by Martine Leavitt**

1. Think of the fairy tales you read as a child. What are some similarities between those and Keturah and Lord Death?
2. Keturah is said by all to be beautiful, yet her physical appearance is not described anywhere in the book. Why do you think the author did that? What parts of her beauty do we see?
3. Lord Death himself acknowledges Keturah's beauty, but must have heard the pleading of countless beautiful maidens in his day. What makes Keturah so special to him?
4. Reread the prologue and the ending. Explain what you think happens. If Keturah indeed dies at the end, then who is telling the story? Keturah says it is the "truest story" she has ever told...but is that the same as saying it is true?

From: <http://www.dcfaward.org/Activities/reviewsandquestions2007-08.htm>; The Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award Website

### **Life as We Knew It by Susan Beth Pfeffer**

1. What was the first major catastrophe that happened when the moon was knocked out of its orbit?
2. What happened to Rhode Island? If you managed to escape, where would you go? Why?
3. What were some of the kids first reactions in school the next day? How do you think you would have felt?
4. Miranda's Mom exhibited foresight in dealing with the seriousness of the situation. List all the things she did to increase her family's chances of survival.
5. In the first week after the asteroid hit, what kept happening that changed the way everyone went about their daily lives? Why is electricity such an essential utility? What do you think is the worst thing to happen if there is no electricity? Why?
6. What happened to the climate during the summer? What did Miranda and her family do to cope? How did Mom's foresight help in this situation?
7. What other disasters besides the tsunamis began to occur? What were the consequences to the planet and it's people?
8. Do you think Dad and Lisa made it to Colorado? Why or why not?
9. Miranda's family was isolated from the community during the winter. In what ways was this both good and bad? What was the decision that Miranda faced at the end of the book?
10. What do you think you would have done in that same situation?

From: [http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya\\_webpage/ritba/ritba08/lifeasweknewit.htm](http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya_webpage/ritba/ritba08/lifeasweknewit.htm)

### **Notes from the Midnight Driver by Jordan Sonnenblick**

1. The description of what happens when Alex drinks and drives is very humorous. Why do you think the author began the story this way?
2. Have you ever felt as angry and upset as Alex was at the beginning of the book?
3. During the novel, we get to hear Alex's point of view through his letters to the judge. At what point do his feelings about Sol start to shift?

4. Music plays a big part in the story. If you're not a musician, can you still appreciate the story?
5. Alex and his best friend Laurie are going through similar situations at home. Which character did you identify with more, Alex or Laurie?

From: [http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya\\_webpage/ritba/ritba08/midnightdriver.htm](http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya_webpage/ritba/ritba08/midnightdriver.htm)

### **Plain Janes by Cecil Castellucci**

1. What event opens the novel? What odd details bring it to life for Jane?
2. Why do Jane's parents move her to suburbia? Where does she wish she lived? Where would you live if you could live anywhere? Why?  
Who is Jane's tribe? Why does she have difficulty getting them to accept her?
3. What does the letters in PLAIN stand for? Would you be willing to join?
4. How does Jane get each one interested in the project? What will they do?
5. What question does the art ask of the community? What happens to most strip malls?
6. Why is Jane's mom keeping her on such a short leash? Do you parents keep one on you? What is the right balance for a teenager?
7. Jane's mother "doesn't see the beauty in anything anymore, she only sees danger." Why? Do you know anyone like this? Is it possible to get past it?
8. Describe the projects the Jane's do in the neighborhood. What type of projects would get your community's attention?
9. The Janes develop confidence through their projects. What gives you confidence? What destroys it?
10. What threat does the officer give the students at Buzz Aldrin High? Why does he consider the art installations attacks? Would you consider them defacing property or not? Why?
11. Why does Jane sometimes wish she was the one who was asleep? Do you ever feel like this? How does she act to get past these dark feelings?
12. Why does Jane quote from Ghandi "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win?" Do you agree?
13. What happened to John Miroslaw? How does this give Jane hope and finally connect her with Damon?
14. Predict what happened between Jane and Damon. What do you think the P.L.A.I.N. Janes' will do next?

Discussion questions from Author website; created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer

### **Right Behind You by Gail Giles**

1. The public is furious that Kip is not sentenced as an adult for the murder of Bobby Clarke, even though he is clearly emotionally unstable. Kip is viewed as a monster and a villain, and because he wasn't punished as the public thought he should have been, his father suffered. Where should the line be drawn when an emotionally disturbed child is

- involved in a violent crime? What right does the public have to intervene in cases that have already been adjudicated?
2. Why does the orderly give Kip a break when he says, “I’m not putting that on your record. You know why? You’re not tough. You’re broken” (page 32). What does the orderly mean by his statement? On what truth does he base his remark?
  3. After Kip’s fight with the kid who torched the cat, he told The Frown, “I’m losing my way here” (page 47). Why is this a significant turning point in his therapy?
  4. Before Kip is released, he finds out from his dad the specifics of the horrible events after the accident, including the consequences of Bobby’s death for his father. The Frown asks Kip to read the newspapers, watch videos of the news, and read some inflammatory letters that his father received. Kip’s father says it doesn’t matter, but it matters to Kip. Why is it so important to him? What makes him realize that life has gone on without him?
  5. On pages 68-71, The Frown gives Kip advice on how to act and what to wear on the first day of school. Is the advice useful? Why or why not?
  6. When AC tells Wade, “You’re not emotionally invested enough in our relationship” (page 138), why doesn’t Wade care?
  7. Wade calls few people by their real names—no one at the state mental ward and no one he knows in Indiana. Even the name he chooses for himself means something. What is the significance of this avoidance behavior?
  8. Wade begins to melt down as events begin going his way. He says, “swimming turned from my savior to my demon” on page 140, and he begins taking medication for anxiety. How does this lead up to his decision to reveal his true identity to his friends? Why doesn’t he consider how his revelation will affect his family?
  9. Wade is not surprised by his friends’ reactions to the truth about his past. How does he make it easier on them to disassociate themselves from him? Why does the coach’s response surprise him? How do Wade and his father make it easier for everyone involved except for themselves and Carrie?
  10. Wade’s father explains to him why Wade felt compelled to tell the truth to his friends on page 161, and he asks Wade for his happiness. How is it possible for Wade to give his father the gift of happiness? How is Wade’s father’s reaction supportive and accepting?
  11. What role does Carrie play in Wade’s life and his journey into wholeness? How does she help both Wade and his father heal? What contributions does she make that enable them to be a whole family?
  12. When Wade finally realizes the truth about his father’s feelings and accepts his own feelings for Carrie, he knows the move to Texas is his last chance for a real life. Why is he willing to risk it all for Sam? What is it about her personality that attracts Wade?
  13. When Wade arrives in Texas, his plan is to avoid people and to be left alone. He says, “unconditional support was too much of a burden” (page 181). What does Wade mean by this? What are Wade’s plans to avoid people and maintain his status of a loner? What prevents him from succeeding?
  14. Based on what the reader knows about Wade, does he succeed in giving his father the gift of his happiness? Why or why not?
  15. What significance does the title have to story events?

From <http://www.hachettebookgroupusa.com/assets/lbyr/textpdf/RightBehindYou.RGG.pdf> . 28 July 2008.

Discussion Guide prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, Fort Worth, TX

To order contact your Hachette Book Group USA sales rep or call 1-800-759-0190.

**Rucker Park Setup by Paul Volponi**

1. What did you enjoy about this book?
2. What have you read that is similar to this book?
3. What are some of the major themes of this book?
4. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish with this novel?
5. Who was your favorite character? What did you appreciate about him/her?
6. Consider the main character: what does he or she believe in? What is he or she willing to fight for?
7. At the end of the book, do you feel hope for the characters?
8. What is stronger in the book: plot or character development? Why? Do you think this was intentional on the part of the author?
9. Have you ever experienced anything similar to the action of this novel?
10. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
11. What are your concerns about this book?
12. How did you feel about the main character?
13. What are the most important relationships in the book?
14. What makes a minor character memorable?
15. What are the most revealing scenes?
16. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
17. What did you think of the style of the writer?
18. Was the story credible? The characters credible?
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### **Side Effects by Amy Goldman Koss**

1. What would you do if you woke up one morning to find that something with your body had drastically changed? Would you react like Izzy, or how would your reaction be different?
2. What are your feelings or opinions about going to the doctor's office? Are you excited because you may miss a day of school, or are you frightened? Why do you feel this way? What happened in your life that may have influenced your feelings about going to the doctor's office?
3. When Izzy learns that she has cancer, she falls to the ground, "as if all my bones had either melted or been suddenly removed." (p. 18) If you received news like Izzy's, how do you think you would react?
4. Izzy hates the Children's Hospital because they treat her like she is eight years old. Even though the hospitals are called Children's Hospitals, they serve people up to the age of eighteen. What could these hospitals do to be more teen friendly?
5. Izzy uses drawing as a way to deal with problems. How does drawing help Izzy to deal with the fact that she has cancer? Do you have a hobby that you do to help yourself through a problem? How does it help you?
6. Izzy's mom has a more difficult time dealing with the fact that Izzy has cancer than Izzy does. How do you think your parents would react if they received scary medical news about you? How would you want them to react?

7. Students in Izzy's school want to help cheer her up so they write her letters. She doesn't like them. As a student in her school, what else could you do to cheer her up?
8. Throughout Izzy's entire time with cancer, her best friend Kay is always right there for her as a support or to brighten her day. Do you have a best friend like Kay? What does your best friend do to be a support for you during tough times?

From: [http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya\\_webpage/ritba/ritba08/sideeffects.htm](http://www.yourlibrary.ws/ya_webpage/ritba/ritba08/sideeffects.htm)

### **Sold by Patricia McCormick**

1. What is Lakshmi's life like in her Nepal mountain village? What events create the need for her to go into the city?
2. Discuss the chapter titled "Everything I Need to Know." What do you think of the mandates that Lakshmi will be forced to live under in her village. Compare it to the chapter of the same title that appears later in the city. How does it represent all the changes in her life?
3. Did you suspect bad intentions with the "auntie" and "uncle" who escorted Lakshmi? Why do you think Lakshmi herself did not hold any? What does this show you about her character?
4. What things does she wonder about on her journey? What ordinary objects fascinate her? How does this innocence help seal her fate?
5. How does Mumtaz gain control over Lakshmi? What tactics does she use to own her both physically and emotionally? What punishment does she exact on girls who disobey or betray her?
6. Describe the other girls and women in the brothel. How do they accept or rail against their lives there? What does Lakshmi learn from them? In the end, what happens to them?
7. For the festival of brothers and sisters, Harish gives Lakshmi a new pencil. This small act of kindness undoes her. Why do you think this "undoes" her? How do others reach out to help each other at the brothel?
8. What does despair look like? How does Lakshmi prevent her own despair from destroying her hope? Is it destroyed in others? How?
9. What happens when Monica leaves the brothel to return to the family she has supported? Do you think Lakshmi's own Ama would do the same upon her return? What about her stepfather? What makes you think so or not?
10. What was the most disturbing part of this story for you? What facts crawled under your skin and haunt you? Do you think there is anything you can do to help? What?

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### **A Thousand Splendid Suns by Khaled Hossieni**

1. The phrase "a thousand splendid suns," from the poem by Saib-e-Tabrizi, is quoted twice in the novel – once as Laila's family prepares to leave Kabul, and again when she decides to return there from Pakistan. It is also echoed in one of the final lines: "Miriam is in Laila's own heart, where she shines with the bursting radiance of a thousand suns." Discuss the thematic significance of this phrase.
2. Mariam's mother tells her: "Women like us. We endure. It's all we have." Discuss how this sentiment informs Mariam's life and how it relates to the larger themes of the novel.

3. By the time Laila is rescued from the rubble of her home by Rasheed and Mariam, Mariam's marriage has become a miserable existence of neglect and abuse. Yet when she realizes that Rasheed intends to marry Laila, she reacts with outrage. Given that Laila's presence actually tempers Rasheed's abuse, why is Mariam so hostile toward her?
4. Laila's friendship with Mariam begins when she defends Mariam from a beating by Rasheed. Why does Laila take this action, despite the contempt Mariam has consistently shown her?
5. Growing up, Laila feels that her mother's love is reserved for her two brothers. "People," she decides, "shouldn't be allowed to have new children if they'd already given away all their love to their old ones." How does this sentiment inform Laila's reaction to becoming pregnant with Rasheed's child? What lessons from her childhood does Laila apply in raising her own children?
6. At several points in the story, Mariam and Laila pass themselves off as mother and daughter. What is the symbolic importance of this subterfuge? In what ways is Mariam's and Laila's relationship with each other informed by their relationships with their own mothers?
7. One of the Taliban judges at Mariam's trial tells her, "God has made us different, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western doctors and their science have proven this." What is the irony in this statement? How is irony employed throughout the novel?
8. Laila's father tells her, "You're a very, very bright girl. Truly you are. You can be anything that you want." Discuss Laila's relationship with her father. What aspects of his character does she inherit? In what ways is she different?
9. Mariam refuses to see visitors while she is imprisoned, and she calls no witnesses at her trial. Why does she make these decisions?
10. The driver who takes Babi, Laila, and Tariq to the giant stone Buddhas above the Bamiyan Valley describes the crumbling fortress of Shahr-e-Zohak as "the story of our country, one invader after another... we're like those walls up there. Battered, and nothing pretty to look at, but still standing." Discuss the metaphorical import of this passage as it relates to Mariam and Laila. In what ways does their story reflect the larger story of Afghanistan's troubled history?
11. Among other things, the Taliban forbid "writing books, watching films, and painting pictures." Yet despite this edict, the film *Titanic* becomes a sensation on the black market. Why would people risk the Taliban's violent reprisals for a taste of popcorn entertainment? What do the Taliban's restrictions on such material say about the power of artistic expression and the threat it poses to repressive political regimes?
12. While the first three parts of the novel are written in the past tense, the final part is written in present tense. What do you think was the author's intent in making this shift? How does it change the effect of this final section?

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### **Twisted by Laurie Halse Anderson**

1. Tyler's landscaping job develops his muscles, but also allows him to use his skills at digging holes: "I was good at digging holes. It was the rest of life I sucked at" (p. 39). What figurative holes has Tyler dug for himself in his life? Is it really true that he isn't good at anything else?

2. Although he doesn't seem like a depressed person, Tyler admits to being preoccupied with death. "Thinking about death relaxed me" (p. 44). Why? In what ways has he died and been reborn again throughout the story?
3. At Tyler's high school there is a clear distinction between the popular crowd and everyone else. Where do you fit in the social scale at your school? In what ways has the status you hold in your social sphere defined you? In what ways is this role true to who you are? In what ways is it not?
4. Why does Tyler like Bethany? Were there any signs early on that she might not really like him the same way he liked her? What do you think is her real attraction to him? Is it true when his sister Hannah says that it could never have worked out? In your own life, are there any examples of two very different people who manage to be together despite their apparent differences?
5. What do you think of Tyler's reaction to Bethany's behavior at the party? How would you react? Would you be sad? Angry?
6. Why do you think Laurie Halse Anderson chose "Twisted" as the title of this novel? What does it mean in relation to the story?
7. On the surface Tyler seems to disrespect the janitors that he is made to work with as part of his probation. Yet they act as a sort of conscience and offer support later in the story. Have you ever gotten help from an unexpected source?
8. Who has Tyler been trying to be? His father? A loser? A cool guy? Which of these identities is closest to his true self?

From: <http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/twisted.html>

### **Uglies by Scott Westerfield**

1. Hoverboards. Tally and her friends use hoverboards for transportation. Why do you suppose Westerfeld devised this means of transportation for his teen characters?
2. Technology. "Rusty" technology came to a disastrous end. Why? The technology of Tally's time has developed very differently. Is it better and safer, or is disaster still possible?
3. Symmetry. Tally and Shay play with computer programming that allows them to see themselves with an endless array of makeovers. Tally believes people just naturally see beauty in symmetry. Shay disagrees. Do you think it is natural or learned?
4. You can experiment with facial symmetry. It can be done by manipulating photographs in a computer, much as Tally and Shay do it. It can also be done simply by sitting in front of a mirror and covering half your face.
5. Consider how much importance we place upon appearance. Is our society heading toward a future like the one Tally lives in?
6. Uglies. Why do the uglies call each other insulting names like "squinty."
7. Children in Tally's city seldom see parents and siblings and they are kept apart from those who are over sixteen. Why are they isolated?
8. New Pretty Town. Tally's school chum, Peris, underwent his operation. When Tally found him in New Pretty Town three months later, how had he changed?
9. What role do specials play in this city? Why do they need specials?
10. Maddy's cure. Did Maddy make the right decision? Was she guided entirely by the Hippocratic oath?

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