

# Book Review Discussion Questions



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Book reviews cover the content, themes and worldviews of fiction books, not their literary merit, and equip parents to decide whether a book is appropriate for their children. A book's inclusion does not constitute an endorsement by Focus on the Family. You can request a review of a title you can't find at [reviewrequests@family.org](mailto:reviewrequests@family.org).

# DISCUSSION TOPICS

## Of Mice and Men



This drama is written by John Steinbeck and published by Penguin Classics. *Of Mice and Men* is intended for adults, yet is often assigned to high

school students.

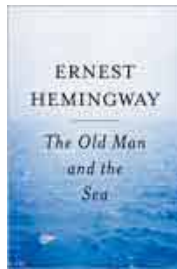
Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. Why did George stay with Lennie? Why did he rant about his life being better without Lennie? Do you think his life will be better without Lennie? What is something you thought you'd be better without but weren't?
2. Steinbeck's story illustrates how the weak are often preyed on by the strong. What are some examples of this throughout the story? Why do you think this happens? How does God want us to treat other people?
3. Why was Crooks forced to live apart from the other workers on the farm? In what areas of your world do prejudices still exist? What role do the media play in inciting racial division? What can you do about this in small ways in your life?
4. George and Lennie have survived for a long time on the strength of their dream to own a farm. What is one dream you have about

your future? What steps can you take to make that dream come true?.

## The Old Man and the Sea



This adventure, drama book by Ernest Hemingway is published by Scribner Book Company, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group and is written for adults but is sometimes studied in high school classes.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway praises determination. He suggests you're a hero not by escaping death or maintaining hope, but simply by persevering. In what ways do these ideas align with a Christian worldview? How do they differ from what the Bible teaches?
2. Santiago's pride causes him to pursue the big fish. Though he has to endure trials, he ultimately gains greater respect from the local fishermen because of his conquest. Does his pride lead to positive or negative ends? What does the Bible say about pride?

3. Why do you think Santiago loves and respects his opponent, the fish, so much?
4. In Hemingway's estimation, man achieves greatness by battling a worthy earthly opponent. Does this differ from what Christianity teaches? In what way?

## Oliver Twist



This historical book by Charles Dickens was originally published by Richard Bentley in 1838 and written for adults, but today it's often found on high

school reading lists for kids ages 16 and up.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. Zara memorizes the technical Oliver and the other orphans are routinely abused and betrayed by the people who are supposed to protect them. Have you ever felt hurt or betrayed by your loved ones or by the people who are taking care of you? What was the situation? How could it have been handled differently?
2. The boys at the workhouse are so desperate for food that they decide someone needs to ask for more. Has there ever been something that you needed but were

afraid to ask for? If yes, what did you need, and why were you afraid?

3. Oliver gets depressed by his situation and wishes he were dead. Have you or anyone you know become so depressed by a situation that you saw no way out of it? What was the situation? Was it resolved, and if it was, how?
4. Noah constantly bullies Oliver until one day Oliver becomes angry and attacks him. Have you ever been bullied? What was the situation? How did you react to the bullying? How was it resolved?
5. How is stealing depicted in this novel? What does the Bible say about stealing?
6. How does Fagin try to corrupt Oliver? Why do you think Oliver refuses to join the gang and give into a life of crime? How do you think you would deal with the temptation of regular food and easy money if you were in Oliver's situation?
7. Is the criminal world depicted in the novel better or worse than the workhouse? Why do you think it is better/worse?
8. How are people's attitudes toward the poor and orphans depicted in the novel? How are poor people and the homeless treated today?
9. The parish councils were in charge of the workhouses and baby farms. This means that the government used the dividing lines of the parishes, but these groups were run by the government. Sometimes clergy were on these committees, but the church was not over the workhouses and baby farms. If churches had been supervising the orphans, poor and sick, how should the church (the body of Christ) have

treated them? How is this directive different from the ways the government-run councils and individuals treated Oliver?

10. How are marriage relationships portrayed in the novel? How are marriages based on economic advantage depicted differently from marriages based on love? Which marriage relationships are portrayed as good and which are bad? What do you think a good marriage relationship should be like?
11. Fagin's character is identified by his race. Why do you think the author chose to identify him this way?

## On the Run



**This Christian adventure book (with an element of science fiction) is the first in “The Elijah Project” series by Bill Myers (with James Riordan), published by Zonderkidz. *On the Run* is written for kids ages 9 to 12.**

**Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).**

**If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:**

1. What other steps might Piper have taken rather than beating up the boy on the bus? Was deducting the boy's dental expenses from Piper's allowance an effective punishment? Why or why not? What would you do as Piper? As Piper's parents?
2. Cody's friend, Willard, recalls a time when two girls physically

fought over Cody. What do you see wrong about obsessing over a person to that degree? Have you experienced feelings like Piper had for Cody (wobbly knees, dry mouth, trouble breathing)? What does the Bible say we should think about in Philippians 4:8? To whom do you think this Bible verse refers?

3. Why do you think the three bad guys continue to do what Shadow Man wants? Do you think they might ever change, or will they always be aligned with evil?
4. Why do you think Mom and Dad won't tell the kids the reason they move so often? How old do you think the kids should be before they know the truth?
5. In this story, the parents leave the house with only a note for the kids. How would you feel if you came home and I was gone?
6. Can you think of a way the kids might have escaped from the bad guys, besides stealing the RV? Are there times when it's ok to steal or do something that's illegal?
7. When Piper is searching for Elijah in the hospital, she begins to feel lost and very alone. Her parents had given her a Bible verse (Matthew 28:20) for just such times. When are some times you felt alone? What did you do to help yourself cope—pray, focus on helping someone else, cry?
8. The second Bible verse that Mom and Dad sent the kids is Romans 8:28. Why do you think they choose that verse when they know that evil forces were after them? What good has come about during the kids' mishaps?
9. Mom and Dad told the kids not to try and find them, but Zach

decides they should anyway, even though there may be a trap. How would you handle this? Does obedience matter, even during dangerous times? Look up Ephesians 6:1-3. What does it mean to obey your father and mother? How is honoring your parents different than obeying?

10. The evil that is personified by Shadow Man knows how to exploit a person's weaknesses. Since we all have weaknesses, what defense do we have against this? What does the apostle Paul tell us about the spiritual forces of evil and how we should protect ourselves (Ephesians 6:11-18)?

## One Came Home



This historical mystery written by Amy Timberlake is published by Knopf Books for Young Readers and Yearling, both divisions of Random House Publishing.

*One Came Home* is written for ages 10 and up.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

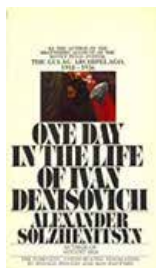
If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. How does Georgie telling Mr. Olmstead about Agatha's kiss affect the plot? What could she have done instead of talking to Mr. Olmstead? What would you have done?
2. Why do you think Agatha walks out into the swarm of birds and spins under her umbrella? What does this tell you about her personality? Would you

have followed her out or stayed back on the porch with Georgie? What is an action that you've done recently that you feel best describes your personality?

3. Why might Georgie have felt compelled to make this journey? What might have changed inside of Georgie if Agatha had never written to tell them she was alive?
4. What does Georgie think happens to us when we die? What do you think happens? What does the Bible say about eternal life? What is an important choice for you to make about your eternal future?
5. Throughout the book, Georgie finds solace in shooting her rifle. How does this change at the end of the book? What has changed her? Is this change a good or bad change? Explain.

## One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich



This historical fiction, drama by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is published by Greenhaven Press, an imprint of Thomson-Gale and is written for

adults but is sometimes studied by kids 16 years and up.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. For a large portion of the book, Shukhov performs good deeds only because he hopes for something in return. When does he

finally perform a selfless act, and why?

2. What are some of the ways Shukhov finds value in his prison camp experience?
3. How does he attempt to maintain his human dignity?
4. What tasks or rituals are meaningful to him, and why do you think they help him remain positive?
5. Why is the camaraderie of the men within the gangs so important to their survival at the camp?
6. What are your impressions of life in a prison camp after reading this book? How do you think people were strong enough to survive such horrible circumstances?
7. Alyoshka is an outspoken Christian, yet his gang mates seem to like and trust him rather than feel put off by him. What are some of his ministry "secrets"?
8. Are there any we can adopt today, in a society that is often hostile to Christians?

## One False Note



This mystery book by Gordon Korman is the second in "The 39 Clues" series and is published by Scholastic, Inc. *One False Note* is written for kids

ages 9 to 12.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. What moral and ethical dilemmas do Dan and Amy face in their effort to stay ahead in the competition? Is it OK for them to steal clues from their competitors? Why or why not? What are some of the ways Dan and Amy cheat or lie to stay ahead? What do they lie about? How do they justify their actions to themselves? Is it OK for them to lie under these circumstances? Is it OK to lie under any circumstance? What does the Bible say about lying?
2. Why do Dan, Amy and Nellie have hateful feelings toward their competitors? How would you have felt about the other Cahills if you were Dan or Amy? How does the Bible tell us to treat our enemies? Could Dan and Amy “turn the other cheek” and still win the contest?
3. How does Amy feel about being a Cahill? Why does she say it made her feel like a part of history? Are any of your ancestors famous people, or did they show integrity amid crisis? Do you have to have famous ancestors or come from a rich or powerful family to do good things in the world? What kind of people does God use to do His work?
4. What have you learned about history or geography from this story? If you could visit one of the cities mentioned in this book, which would you choose? Why?
5. What do you learn about Mozart and his family from this book? Do books that mention historical figures always include real facts? How could you check to see if the author’s information is true? What are some Mozart melodies you’re familiar with?
6. How do adults in the story, such as Jonah’s father, Irina and the Holt parents, treat Dan and Amy? What do they do or say to them? What kind of example do these parents set for their own children? What does their behavior teach their kids about how to treat others?
7. Is Nellie a good role model for Dan and Amy? What makes a good role model? In your day-to-day adventures, how are your parents your role models?
8. In the real world, could two kids and a young lady, such as Nellie, travel all over the world on their own? How would they pay for their adventures? How would they eat? What would they wear? What foreign languages would they need to know?
2. Freddy’s sister calls him a lot of names. How do you know that she really loves him?
3. Bully Max calls Freddy and Robbie stupid. Robbie thought Chloe was cuckoo and spoiled. How should children treat each other with their words? Have you ever called other kids mean names? Are these the words God would want you to use? What could you do differently?
4. How important is it to please your classmates?

## Origin



This science fiction, coming-of-age book by Jessica Khoury is the first in the “Corpus” series and is published by Razorbill, an imprint of the Penguin Group.

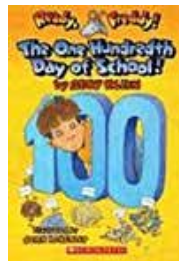
*Origin* is written for kids ages 13 to 17.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. How would the world be different if people were immortal? Do you agree with Kapukiri that no one should live forever? How would your behavior and worldview change if you knew that you could never die or be killed?
2. This book has an underlying theme of people sacrificing themselves to save others. What are some examples of this that take place in the book? How is sacrificing yourself to save another person different from killing

## The One Hundredth Day of School!



This thirteenth school-life book in the “Ready, Freddy!” series by Abby Klein is published by The Blue Sky Press, an imprint of Scholastic, Inc.

*The One Hundredth Day of School!* is written for kids ages 4 to 8.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. Freddy doesn’t want to bring just anything on the 100th day of school. Who does he want to please with what he brings? What is the difference between serving others and pleasing others?

an individual so that the whole group can benefit?

3. Why did Alex and Marian run away? Would you have fled if you learned that you were part of an experiment that involved murdering people, or would the promise of immortality be too tempting? Explain. Has someone ever asked you to do something wrong and said it was part of a plan to do something good? If so, describe what happened. If not, think about things that happened in history where people did this. Were they right or wrong?
4. Why does Aunt Harriet complete her Wickham test even though she believes it's a sin to shoot an innocent and beautiful animal? Would you have killed the horse if it meant you had the chance of saving a family member's life? What if your Wickham test, like Uncle Paolo's, involved killing another human being? Where would you draw the line?
5. What do Christians believe about human immortality? How is this different from the kind of immortal beings that the scientists are trying to create? How is it similar to the Aï'oan beliefs about immortality? Is death always a bad thing?
6. What is the symbolism of the necklace that Eio gives Pia? Do you think that a person can ever belong to another person? Did you think Eio and Pia's relationship felt rushed or do you think that two people can genuinely learn to love each other in such a short period of time? Explain.

## The Original Adventure of Hank the Cowdog



This humor story by John R. Erickson is the first in the “Hank the Cowdog” series published by Viking of the Penguin Group, part of Penguin

Putnam Books for Young Readers. (Illustrations are by Gerald L. Holmes.) *The Original Adventures of Hank the Cowdog* is written for kids ages 8 to 10.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. How does Hank view himself? How would you describe Hank? In what ways does Hank have a distorted picture of himself? Why is it important not to think too highly of yourself?
2. What are some ways Hank gets himself into trouble? If you were Hank, what would you do differently to be a reliable Head of Ranch Security?
3. Why does Hank decide to become an outlaw? Why does he ultimately choose to return to the ranch? When you've been away from home, what do you miss most? What makes our home a special place for you?

## The Orphan King



This fantasy adventure by Sigmund Brouwer is the first in the “Merlin's Immortals” series published by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the

Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc. *The Orphan King* is written for kids ages 12 and up.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. How do Thomas' interactions with women, such as Isabelle, Katherine and the woman in the forest, cause him to keep or lose his focus? Why is modesty important? Why does William urge Thomas to keep his eyes to himself? What is one way the Bible offers for handling temptation?
2. What causes Thomas to doubt the existence or goodness of God? How do humans often make God look bad? What can you do to show God's goodness to others?
3. Thomas had many questions about spiritual things. Why couldn't he get them answered? Do you think he'll now get some of them answered? Explain. What questions do you have about God? How might you pursue the answers to those questions?

## The Outsiders



This teen-life book by S.E. Hinton is published by Viking Children's Books, an imprint of Penguin Group and is written for kids ages 12 to 18.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

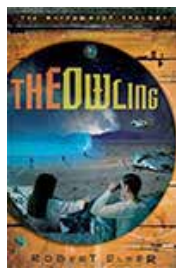
If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. Maya often lies to her mom and How does the violence and hatred in this book make you feel?
2. Why do you think these young people—greasers and socs—feel they need to fight?
3. How does Darry parent well? How does he parent not so well?
4. Despite all the violence in The Outsiders, Ponyboy clearly values human life—even the lives of his enemies. What are some of the ways you see this through his words and actions?
5. What does Johnny mean when he urges Ponyboy to stay gold?
6. How can you keep from becoming hateful and cynical in a world that doesn't always seem fair?
7. In what ways are Ponyboy's greaser friends good for him? In what ways do they bring him down? Do you think they would help him or hurt him as he tries to keep his priorities straight? How are your friends good for you? How do your friends bring you down?

8. Is Dally's death a suicide?
9. What does this tragedy teach Ponyboy and his brothers?

When is it OK to question or rebel against authority?

## The Owling



This science fiction/fantasy book is the second in the "The Shadowside Trilogy" by Roger Elmer and is published by Zondervan. *The*

*Owling* is written for kids ages 13 and up.

Search for a review of this book for parents at [pluggedin.com/book-reviews](http://pluggedin.com/book-reviews).

If your children have read this book, consider talking about the story using these discussion questions:

1. How did Ori feel about Sola initially? How did Sola's flattery change Ori? What did Ori discover about Sola's motives? Have you ever been blinded to the truth? What kept you from thinking things through clearly?
2. What did you think when you read about the Numa? How is it like the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to His followers?
3. Oriannon rushes boldly into the Owling camp in an attempt to save her friends. When Jesmet appears to Ori and the Owlings in the prison camp, what does he ask her to do? How difficult is it for her to wait? Do you have a hard time waiting on God? What is the difference between doing nothing and waiting on the Lord's timing?
4. What do Ori and her friends do that go against their authorities?