EplusL Edu | Every big idea begins from one word.

Parent Reading Discussion Guide

High School Edition · Deep Readers & Expert Readers · Ages 13–18

Organized by reading theme · 2 conversation questions per book

How to Use This Guide

This guide follows EplusL Edu's theme-based curation. Books on the same theme are grouped together so you can return to the same big question — "Who am I?", "What is justice?" — across multiple books.

Before you start:

- Don't look for a "right" answer. These questions open doors — they're not tests.
- If your child's answer surprises you, ask "What makes you think that?" before responding.
- If you've read two or three books in the same theme, try asking: "What do these books have in common?"
- Share your own thoughts and experiences too. It makes the conversation richer.
- You don't need to use both questions at once. Drop one naturally whenever the moment feels right.

Deep Readers · Ages 13–15

This is the age for moral gray areas, social questions, and the space between right and wrong. Instead of giving your child answers, ask questions that let them find their own voice.

THEME: THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Books Where Language Itself Is the Story

These authors chose every word with precision. Reading them is a lesson in how language shapes meaning, character, and power.

1. Pride and Prejudice — *Jane Austen*

Q1 Elizabeth and Darcy have to work through serious misunderstandings and first impressions. Has a first impression of someone ever turned out to be completely wrong?

Q2 What did marriage mean for women in this era that it doesn't mean today?

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2. Their Eyes Were Watching God — *Zora Neale Hurston*

Q1 Janie goes through several marriages before finding what she truly wants. Why is it so hard to balance what others expect of us with what actually makes us happy?

Q2 What kind of freedom does Janie finally reach by the end?

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3. The Great Gatsby — *F. Scott Fitzgerald*

Q1 Gatsby rebuilds his entire identity to win Daisy back. Why is his dream ultimately impossible?

Q2 How does this novel portray the American Dream? Is it a celebration or a critique?

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4. Beloved — *Toni Morrison*

Q1 Sethe makes an unthinkable choice within a deeply painful historical context. How does this story show us the trauma of slavery?

Q2 What do you think the character of Beloved symbolizes?

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5. A Room with a View — *E.M. Forster*

Q1 Lucy is torn between social expectations and her real feelings. How do you balance being "yourself" against what others want you to be?

Q2 What does the "view" symbolize throughout the novel?

Books That Break the Rules of Storytelling

Diary entries, fables, mosaics, mysteries, dystopias — these authors put meaning inside the form itself.

1. A Monster Calls — *Patrick Ness*

Q1 Conor is terrified to face a painful truth. Why is facing the truth so necessary, even when it hurts?

Q2 Why do the monster's stories teach us that there are no easy answers?

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2. The House on Mango Street — *Sandra Cisneros*

Q1 This book is built from short, fragmented vignettes that together form a life. Does that form make Esperanza's voice feel more immediate to you?

Q2 What does Esperanza mean when she says she will come back "for the ones who cannot out"?

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3. Scythe — *Neal Shusterman*

Q1 In this world there's no death — Scythes manage the population instead. Is a world without death actually better?

Q2 What moral tensions do Citra and Rowan face in taking on this role?

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4. I Am the Messenger — *Markus Zusak*

Q1 Ed receives mysterious cards that send him to help strangers. What kind of change can a small act of help actually create?

Q2 How does Ed himself grow through the missions he's given?

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5. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian — *Sherman Alexie*

Q1 Junior is caught between two schools and two worlds. Have you ever felt caught between two places where you're never fully accepted?

Q2 How does humor — and the cartoons — help carry a story this heavy?

THEME: WHO AM I?

Books That Ask the Hardest Question

High school is when this question stops being abstract. These characters are pushed by circumstance, loss, and love to decide: who am I, and what will I refuse to compromise?

1. The Catcher in the Rye — *J.D. Salinger*

Q1 Holden sees the adult world as full of "phonies." Have you ever noticed a gap between how adults present themselves and who they actually are?

Q2 What is Holden really trying to protect?

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2. Jane Eyre — *Charlotte Brontë*

Q1 Jane holds onto her dignity through poverty and prejudice. What does "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me" mean to you?

Q2 What do you think of Jane's decision to return to Rochester?

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3. Their Eyes Were Watching God — *Zora Neale Hurston*

Q1 Janie sheds one version of herself after another throughout the story. Have you ever felt the tension between the self others define for you and the self you're finding on your own?

Q2 What kind of freedom does Janie finally reach by the end?

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4. The Kite Runner — *Khaled Hosseini*

Q1 Amir carries the guilt of a childhood betrayal for his entire life. What's the difference between carrying guilt and actually seeking forgiveness?

Q2 Why is the phrase "there is a way to be good again" so central to this book?

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5. A Separate Peace — *John Knowles*

Q1 Gene's friendship with Finny is tangled with jealousy and fear. Have you ever felt envious of a close friend?

Q2 How does guilt over what Gene did shape who he becomes?

THEME: UNDERSTANDING OTHERS

Books That Change How You See the World

Prejudice, justice, and the courage to see the world through someone else's eyes.

1. To Kill a Mockingbird — *Harper Lee*

Q1 Atticus defends Tom Robinson even knowing the town is against him. Why does doing the right thing still matter when the outcome is already decided?

Q2 How does Scout's view of Boo Radley shift by the end of the book?

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2. The Book Thief — *Markus Zusak*

Q1 Death narrates this story. How does looking at war through Death's eyes change what it feels like?

Q2 Why does Liesel steal books? What do they mean to her?

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3. Of Mice and Men — *John Steinbeck*

Q1 George and Lennie's friendship sustains them through brutally hard times. What does true friendship actually look like?

Q2 What do you think of George's final choice? Was there another way?

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4. Things Fall Apart — *Chinua Achebe*

Q1 Okonkwo fights to preserve tradition as colonialism erases everything he knows. What does it mean to hold onto culture in the face of unstoppable change?

Q2 Why does it matter that this story is told by an African author, not a European one?

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5. The Kite Runner — *Khaled Hosseini*

Q1 The story is set against Afghanistan's political upheaval. How can historical events shatter the private world of a friendship?

Q2 Why is "there is a way to be good again" so important in this book?

THEME: EVIDENCE & SCIENCE

Books Where Asking the Right Question Changed Everything

Cells harvested without consent. A silenced spring. An extinction already in progress. In each of these books, the stubborn pursuit of evidence overturns what the world believed to be true.

1. The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks — *Rebecca Skloot*

Q1 Henrietta's cells were used in medical research without her knowledge or consent. Should scientific progress ever outweigh an individual's rights over their own body?

Q2 How do you feel about what the Lacks family experienced for decades?

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2. Silent Spring — *Rachel Carson*

Q1 Carson used this book to warn the world about pesticides. Do you believe one person's voice can actually change the direction of an industry — or a government?

Q2 Are there things we use without question today that might be revealed as harmful in the future?

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3. Lab Girl — *Hope Jahren*

Q1 Jahren weaves her love of science together with the story of her own life. Have you ever lost yourself completely in something you love?

Q2 What does she learn about life from trees and plants that also applies to people?

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4. The Sixth Extinction — *Elizabeth Kolbert*

Q1 Kolbert argues that humans are causing a mass extinction right now. What's your reaction to that claim?

Q2 Can the small choices each of us makes in daily life actually make a difference at that scale?

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5. The Martian — *Andy Weir*

Q1 Mark Watney is stranded on Mars and refuses to give up, solving one problem at a time. Where does that kind of calm problem-solving come from in a genuinely hopeless situation?

Q2 What role does humor play in keeping him alive — emotionally as much as practically?

THEME: COURAGE & CHARACTER

What Will You Risk to Remain Yourself?

When the people who love you — or the systems that judge you — want you to become what they expect, what does it cost to stay yourself?

1. The Chocolate War — *Robert Cormier*

Q1 "Do I dare disturb the universe?" Jerry refuses to sell chocolates and stands alone against enormous social pressure. What would you say?

Q2 Why is standing against the majority so hard, even when you know you're right?

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2. The Poet X — *Elizabeth Acevedo*

Q1 Xiomara finds her voice through poetry. Do you have your own way of expressing emotions that feels truly yours?

Q2 This novel is written entirely in verse. Does that form change how the story feels to you?

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3. Monster — *Walter Dean Myers*

Q1 Steve records his trial as a screenplay. How does that format reveal what's happening inside him?

Q2 Who does the title "Monster" actually refer to? How does Steve's sense of himself shift across the story?

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4. American Born Chinese — *Gene Luen Yang*

Q1 Three storylines eventually converge into one. Have you ever wrestled with questions about your own identity?

Q2 Why is the choice between being your authentic self and being who others want you to be so difficult?

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5. Purple Hibiscus — *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

Q1 Kambili's family looks flawless from the outside but is full of fear and control inside. What happens when a person's public image and private reality don't match?

Q2 What does the 'free laughter' Kambili finds at her cousins' house mean to her — and why does it feel so foreign at first?

Expert Readers · Ages 15–18

Classical literature with dense language and rich historical context. Let your child interpret freely — and feel okay about disagreeing with you.

1. The Great Gatsby — *F. Scott Fitzgerald*

Q1 Gatsby reinvents himself entirely to win back Daisy. Why is his dream ultimately impossible?

Q2 How is the American Dream depicted in this novel? Is it celebrated or critiqued?

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2. A Tale of Two Cities — *Charles Dickens*

Q1 Sydney Carton's sacrifice is the emotional core of this novel. What does it mean to give yourself up for someone else?

Q2 "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Why does that opening line capture the whole story?

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3. Pride and Prejudice — *Jane Austen*

Q1 Elizabeth and Darcy overcome real misunderstanding and deep-rooted prejudice. Have you ever realized a first impression was completely wrong?

Q2 What did marriage mean for women in this era that it doesn't mean today?

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4. The Odyssey — *Homer (Emily Wilson translation)*

Q1 Odysseus endures years of suffering to get home. What do you think the journey itself — not the destination — symbolizes?

Q2 How does Penelope's patience and intelligence compare to Odysseus's adventures?

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5. Jane Eyre — *Charlotte Brontë*

Q1 Jane protects her dignity through poverty and prejudice. What does "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me" mean to you?

Q2 What do you think of Jane's decision to return to Rochester?

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6. The Scarlet Letter — *Nathaniel Hawthorne*

Q1 Hester endures public shame and builds her own quiet dignity. Between society's condemnation and personal truth, which has more power?

Q2 How does Dimmesdale's hidden guilt destroy him from the inside?

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7. Things Fall Apart — *Chinua Achebe*

Q1 Okonkwo fights to hold tradition together as colonialism dismantles everything he knows. What does it mean to preserve culture in the face of unstoppable change?

Q2 Why does it matter that this story is written by an African author rather than a European one?

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8. 1984 — *George Orwell*

Q1 "Big Brother is watching you." How does this society control truth and freedom?

Q2 What did you feel watching Winston's transformation at the end? What warning does this book carry for us?

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9. Beloved — *Toni Morrison*

Q1 Sethe's choice is made within a devastating historical reality. How does this story show us the lasting trauma of slavery?

Q2 What does the figure of Beloved symbolize?

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