



# Discussion Guides

2006-2007 Peach Award Nominees

## **47 by Walter Mosley**

Go to [http://www.twbookmark.com/library/47\\_teacherguide.pdf](http://www.twbookmark.com/library/47_teacherguide.pdf)

## **Acceleration by Graham McNamee**

1. Why do you think the title of the book is Acceleration? Can you think of several ways things accelerate in the story?
2. Can you think of some ways that the author has used symbolism in his story? For example, why is Duncan's job located in the sub-sub basement? Why does Vinny have a crippled arm?
3. Why is Duncan friends with two such different people as Wayne and Vinny? How does each of them help him find the Roach?
4. Why don't the police believe Duncan when he shows them the diary? Should he have told them the truth after his confrontation with the Roach? Why or why not?
5. Why doesn't Duncan approach the girl, Cherry, that he identifies as one of the Roach's targets?
6. Knowing what Vinny discovers about serial killers in his research, do you understand why Roach does what he does?
7. Why does Duncan's boss, Jacob, "fit" the job in the Lost and Found?
8. How does this experience change Duncan? Does he have different relationships with his parents, his friends, his former girlfriend?
9. Put yourself in Duncan's place. What would you have done?

## **The Amulet of Samarkand by Jonathan Stroud**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or

- vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
  6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
  7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
  8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
  9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
  10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### **The Burn Journals by Brent Runyon**

1. This memoir is unique in that Runyon chooses not to annotate his account from an adult perspective but rather to let his fourteen-year-old voice stand alone. How does this lack of analysis and retrospective insight shape the narrative? What effect does the detached, primitive, sometimes belligerent nature of this teenage voice have on the story?
2. How does Brent's nebulous adolescent understanding of his own sexuality play into his depression? Do his thwarted attempts at intimacy with women and girls read as comical or disturbing? Does he mature in this area over the course of the memoir?
3. Brent recounts several episodes that seem to suggest a lack of sensitivity on the part of his parents to his violent tendencies, even after his release from rehab. In one, his father employs Brent's reluctant help in bludgeoning a possum to death. In another, his father buys Brent boxing gloves and allows Brent to knock him to the ground. In a third, Brent ponders his childhood practice of mutilating toys, a habit obviously unnoticed by his parents. Are these passages intended to cast blame on Brent's parents on some level? Or are they meant simply to pinpoint Brent's growing awareness of violence and its ramifications? Why do you think he includes them?
4. Brent struggles to find a means to articulate his sorrow and regret over the disaster to his family. Yet when presented with family therapy specifically tailored to facilitating this kind of dialogue, Brent becomes reticent, unyielding, and sarcastic. Why?
5. Brent writes of his burn treatments: "There are two kinds of people in this world. People that have to lie on their stomachs for ten days straight and people that don't. And the lucky bastards that don't have to lie on their stomachs for ten ... days are the ones that get to skate through life like

- they have their own personal Zamboni smoothing the way for them" [p. 82]. How much responsibility does Brent accept for his injury? To what extent does he blame fate?
6. Brent's mantra, "I hate myself," continues well after the fire. How much of this can be attributed to the normal pains of adolescence? What are the signs that his self-loathing is abating or shifting by the time he returns to school?
  7. Some of the memoir's most excruciating dialogues occur in the context of psychological evaluation. In the presence of a family therapist, Brent has a bizarre argument with his mother over whether five or ten minutes of silence have passed [p. 136]. During a session with two psychologists, Brent accuses one of the doctors of saying "scarcastic" instead of "sarcastic" [p. 216]. Do these episodes suggest true madness, or does Brent purposefully warp his ostensible grasp on reality in order to get attention? What sort of agony do you think therapy sessions like those Brent describes can invoke for a teenage boy?
  8. In *Darkness Visible*, his memoir of mental illness, William Styron writes, "Depression is a disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self - to the mediating intellect - as to verge close to being beyond description. It thus remains nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode." Does *The Burn Journals* succeed in rendering Runyon's depression comprehensible to readers? Is this book an appropriate cautionary or helpful tale for depressed teenagers to read?
  9. One reviewer wrote of *The Burn Journals*: "[Brent] isn't spared the sight of the pain felt by his family and friends, as he would have been had he died. In accepting the burden of the anguish he caused them, he finds healing and a new depth to his relationships" ["*The Burn Journals* A Gripping Must-Read" by Karyn Saemann, *The Capital Times*, November 5, 2004]. Is this an accurate assessment? If so, what evidence is there of Brent's healing? Which relationships are deepened and renewed?
  10. When Brent's parents ask him if he is involved in the occult, Brent is overwhelmed and hurt by their ignorance of him. "They know nothing about me. Nothing at all.... Why don't they love me? Why don't they take care of me? Why don't they act like I'm their son? ... I can't believe how little they know me" [p. 192]. Does Brent ever convey this sense of betrayal to them? Does this issue of misinterpretation reach a denouement?
  11. When Brent is given permission to forgo his plastic face mask when he goes back to school, why does he hesitate?
  12. Which of Brent's caregivers makes the most lasting difference in his recovery process? Why?
  13. The passages that describe Brent's burn care routine in the hospital are graphic, even grisly. What role do they play in the memoir?
  14. When a nurse suggests that Brent ought to be grateful for his lapses in memory after the fire, Brent's mental response is, "I don't want to forget anything. I don't care if they are terrible memories. They're mine" [p. 86]. To what extent is Brent's journey out of darkness a process of reclamation? What societal forces could cause an upper-middle-class white teenager to feel disenfranchised or in need of reclaiming what is rightfully his?

### **Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the book's structure. Does the author use any narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How does this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
3. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read his or her favorite passage out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) How does this particular passage relate to the story as a whole? Does it reveal anything specific about any of the characters or illuminate certain aspects of the story?

4. Talk about the time period in which the story is set. How well does the author convey the era? Did you have a sense of whether or not the author remained true to the events, social structures and political events of the time period?
5. Is this a time period that you knew a lot about before you read this book? If so, did you learn anything new? If not, did you come away with a greater understanding of what this particular time and place in history was actually like?
6. Is it difficult to keep our own, modern-day experiences from influencing the reading of a historical fiction tale? Can we imagine what life was really like for the characters within the context of the time period?
7. Compare this book to other works of historical fiction your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book?
8. Why do you suppose works of historical fiction are so popular with readers? What appeals to you the most about these types of books?
9. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more work by this author?

### **A Crack in the Line by Michael Lawrence**

1. The title of this book — *A Crack in the Line* — refers to the crack in the rail line that caused the train accident that Alaric's and Naia's mother was in. What other type of crack or break could this title refer to?
2. Alaric and Naia each say good-bye to their father as a snowstorm is about to hit their English village. Is the farewell scene similar in the two realities? Why did the author physically remove the father from the family situation at this point in the story?
3. When Alaric realizes he has entered an alternate reality in which his mother has not died in a train accident, he initially thinks that the alternate realities began with the train wreck. Why is that not possible?
4. When Alaric's mother finds the Folly and decides to create a new centerpiece to put under the glass dome, all Alaric knows is that she is using a piece of wood from the Family Tree in their garden (p. 25). What role do the tree and the garden have in creating the alternate realities?
5. How did Naia react when, on his first visit to her reality, she saw Alaric run to the Folly and then vanish into thin air? How does her "physicist in the making" frame of mind affect her response?
6. In both realities Alaric's and Naia's mother had been in a train accident. How did the aftermath of the accident differ in their worlds? What do the words "fifty-fifty" have to do with the difference?
7. Aunt Liney tells Alaric that she has been born out of wedlock and that her father had wanted her mother to have an abortion. Her mother had changed her mind at the last moment (p. 79). What does this have to do with the fact that Aunt Liney does not exist in Naia's reality?
8. When Alaric continued to hold onto Naia's arm, enduring the shocking pain of contact with her, his hand sunk into her arm. Why do you think contact between them caused this type of reaction (pp. 177–78)? Did their meeting in the garden have anything to do with it?
9. Naia finds a strange message in the Family Tree's message hole that both she and Alaric had used as children (pp. 221–27). Who is it from and does it make any sense?
10. Alaric entered yet a third reality, in which a murder had occurred. Who committed the murder? Is it someone Alaric knows? How did Alaric enter this altered reality, even though he had not touched the Folly?
11. Realizing that there may be more than one other reality where he exists, Alaric has become afraid to use the Folly. He fears what would happen if he came face-to-face with himself. Do you think he could ever survive such an occurrence (p. 247)?
12. What happened when Alaric and Naia tried to enter each other's reality at the same time? Which one of the "realities" do you think won out? Did Alaric get to have his mother back in his life? Who do you think would handle the situation better — Alaric or Naia?

## **The Day of Tears by Julius Lester**

Go to <http://www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com/data/books/tgpdf/07868049041480.pdf>

## **Elsewhere by Gabrielle Zevin**

1. Water is a powerful image and symbol that runs throughout the book. Liz's story opens on the ocean; the Well is in the water; the Observation Decks face the water; Liz can communicate through a water source with her brother, Alvy. What other aspects of the importance of water are evident in the novel? Why does the author elect to use water as such an essential symbol? Comment on some of the other symbols, such as Liz's stitches, the watch her father gave her, and the snow globe.
2. This novel is divided into three separate parts and also employs a prologue and an epilogue. Understanding the structure of the novel is important to understanding the story itself. Why is the scene with Liz's dog, Lucy, the first glimpse the author provides of the story? How does this scene foreshadow what will come later in the novel? How does the epilogue bring the novel not to a close but to a resolution? What purpose do the three parts serve? What important events occur in each of the three parts?
3. There are many characters who are part of the story of ELSEWHERE, all of them critical to it. The author, Gabrielle Zevin, introduces the characters early in the story. Liz meets Thandi and Curtis on the ship, Grandma Betty upon her arrival, Aldous Ghent at the acclimation session, and Owen at the Well. No characters, not even the canine ones, are minor to the story. Explore how the characters move the novel forward. For instance, what important role does Esther, the supervisor at the Observation Deck, play? Why is Thandi critical to the story? Could the novel be complete without Sadie or Lucy or Alvy? How does each of them help Liz adjust to life on Elsewhere and come to understand that life on Elsewhere is something to be cherished?
4. Notice the allusions made to classic and contemporary literature throughout the novel. Liz recalls a line about antique lands. Aldous Ghent prompts Liz to read Shakespeare's *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*. Liz reads E. B. White's *CHARLOTTE'S WEB* as she grows younger. Finally, Owen reads Natalie Babbitt's *TUCK EVERLASTING* to Liz when she is no longer able to read on her own. Every one of these titles deals with some aspect of life as it relates to Elsewhere as well as Earth. How does each address some facet of Liz's life and experiences?
5. How does the author use humor in the novel? What examples of wordplay are evident? For instance, Liz is aboard a ship called the *Nile* and Thandi tells her she is in denial (denile). Another example of this gentle humor is when Liz meets Sadie and informs the dog that she is drinking from a toilet. Locate other instances of humor and discuss how it is used in the novel. Is the humor intended to defuse the emotion of a serious situation or scene? Is it more of a way to show how Liz is becoming acclimated to life on Elsewhere?
6. Be sure to visit the Web site for the book at: [www.fsgkidsbooks.com/elsewhere/index.htm](http://www.fsgkidsbooks.com/elsewhere/index.htm). How does the structure of the site reflect the structure and content of the novel?
7. Liz and all the other arrivals in Elsewhere are encouraged to find an avocation to pursue during their time there. Ghent explains to Liz that an avocation is something that makes one's soul complete (page 74). Some of the residents of Elsewhere work in avocations similar to the jobs they did on Earth; others have new ones. Marilyn Monroe becomes a psychiatrist. Curtis Jest decides to be a sherman and comments that John Lennon is a gardener. How do the avocations of Monroe, Lennon, Owen, Betty, Curtis, and other characters reflect what they really want out of their new lives?

### **The Haunting of Alaizabel Cray by Chris Wooding**

1. What is worse, the real or the imagined horrors in the book?
2. After reading this story, how did you feel about the city of London?
3. Contrast the characters of Cathaline and Alaizabel.
4. Can Thaniel trust that the spirits who possessed Alaizabel are truly gone? What do you do when you are not sure whom you can trust?
5. Before the true character of Cradle Jack was revealed, how does he compare to Jack the Ripper?
6. Describe how something like this could happen today. Who would you think an equal of a wych-kin hunter would be in today's world?
7. Describe how you would visualize our world today if the demonic overthrow was successful.
8. What would it be like to be controlled the way Alaizabel was?
9. How much of our lives do you think are under self-control?
10. Do you agree with Dr. Pike, "Mankind is not yet mature enough to take responsibility for its mistakes"?

### **Home of the Braves by David Klass**

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?

### **Jude by Kate Morgenroth**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not?
2. How is the book structured? Does the author use any narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect your reading of the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
3. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read his or her favorite passage out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll

- be prepared.) How does this particular passage relate to the story as a whole? Does it reveal anything specific about any of the characters or illuminate certain aspects of the story?
4. Discuss the mystery aspect of the plotline. How effective is the author's use of plot twists and red herrings? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened, or did the author keep you guessing until the end of the story? Did you find that the novel held everyone's interest throughout the story, or were there times when it failed to totally engross members of the group?
  5. How important is the setting to the story? If applicable, discuss the time period in which the book is set. Does the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story?
  6. What is the most important part of a mystery or thriller to each member of the group—characterization, action, dialogue, or setting? How does this book rate in each of these areas?
  7. Is this book part of a series? If so, did your group read the series in order? How has reading the books in order—or not reading them in order—affected your group's enjoyment of the book? How does this book stack up against others in the series?
  8. Is the author equally invested in both character and plot? Or did the author put more effort into developing the story than in creating compelling and believable characters? Were the motivations of the characters believable, or did their actions feel like a means to further the plot?
  9. Agatha Christie wrote in her autobiography about her dislike of mysteries having a romantic subplot. Do you agree or disagree with her views? Did this book have an element of romance? If so, do you feel the love aspect enhanced or detracted from the story?
  10. Would you recommend this work to a non mystery/thriller fan simply on the basis of its literary merit? Would you endorse it purely because of the skillful writing and the well-developed characters? Or do you think the work would strictly appeal to fans of the mystery/thriller genre.
  11. Is your group familiar with the author's previous works? If so, did this book live up to or exceed your expectations of the author?
  12. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more work by this author?

### **Looking for Alaska by John Green**

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?

**Lulu Dark Can See Through Walls by Bennett Madison**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### **Odd Thomas by Dean Koontz**

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?

### **Peaches by Jodi Lynn Anderson**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story

- chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
  8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
  9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
  10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### **Spellbound by Janet McDonald**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book?

- For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
  9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
  10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### **Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers by Mary Roach**

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 book?
5. Did you find this book a quick read? Why or why not?
6. What are your concerns about this book?
7. How did you feel about the subject matter?
8. What are the most important points in the book?
9. What are the most revealing scenes?
10. Are any of the events in the book relevant to your own life?
11. What did you think of the style of the writer?
12. Was the story credible?
13. Did you find any flaws in the book?

### **Tending to Grace by Kimberly Newton Fusco**

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language

- of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?
  6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
  7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
  8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
  9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
  10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### ***Under the Persimmon Tree by Suzanne Fisher Staples***

1. For the person who chose this book: What made you want to read it? What made you suggest it to the group for discussion? Did it live up to your expectations? Why or why not? Are you sorry/glad that you suggested it to the group (ask again after the discussion)?
2. Did you think the characters and their problems/decisions/relationships were believable or realistic? If not, was the author trying to make them realistic, and why did he or she fail? Did the male/female author draw realistic male and female characters? Which character could you relate to best and why? Talk about the secondary characters. Were they important to the story? Did any stand out for you?
3. How was the book structured? Did the author use any structural or narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it? Whose voice was the story told in (from whose point of view is the story told)? How do you think it might have been different if another character was telling the story?
4. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read their favorite couple of passages out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) Was the language appropriate to the story? Was it more poetic or vernacular? Did it stand in the way of your appreciation of the story, or enhance your enjoyment of the book? If poetic, did the characters speak in vernacular language, or in the poetic language of the author? Was the dialogue realistic sounding? Was there a rhythm to the authors style, or anything else that might be considered unique about it?
5. Was the author fairly descriptive? Was he or she better at describing the concrete or the abstract? Was the author clear about what he or she was trying to say, or were you confused by some of what you read? How did this affect your reading of the book?

6. Talk about the plot. What was more important, the characters or the plot? Was the plot moved forward by decisions of the characters, or were the characters at the mercy of the plot? Was the action believable? What events in the story stand out for you as memorable? Was the story chronological? Was there foreshadowing and suspense or did the author give things away at the beginning of the book? Was this effective? How did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
7. What were some of the major themes of the book? Are they relevant in your life? Did the author effectively develop these themes? If so, how? If not, why not? Was there redemption in the book? For any of the characters? Is this important to you when reading a book? Did you think the story was funny, sad, touching, disturbing, moving? Why or why not?
8. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?
9. Talk about the location. Was it important to the story? Was the author's description of the landscape/community a good one? Talk about the time period of the story (if appropriate). Was it important to the story? Did the author convey the era well? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story? Why or why not for all of the above? Was pertinent information lumped altogether, or integrated into the story? How did this affect your appreciation of the book?
10. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

### **Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories of Girls and the Boys in Their Lives by Sharon Flake**

#### *So I Ain't No Good Girl*

1. Why does the young woman let Raheem treat her in the manner he does? Does she have a choice? What will her future relationships be like?

#### *The Ugly One*

2. Discuss the significance of Barley's comment "Just 'cause you ugly, don't mean you can't have friends"? What issues surround the relationship between the way you look, the way you are created, and the way you feel? How does Asia's fantasy life differ from reality? How is this significant?

#### *Wanted: A Thug*

3. Predict whether Melody will follow the advice she was given. If she does, will Row-D just find someone new? Discuss fidelity in teen relationships. Do you think this story accurately shows how teens treat each other? How faithful are boys vs. girls in teen relationships? Do you think it is fair for the girl to suffer all the consequences of an illicit encounter? Why or why not?

#### *I Know a Stupid Boy When I See One*

4. Discuss this quote: "I like boys like him . . . Slow, stupid boys. They give you anything you want, and you ain't hardly gotta do nothing to get it, neither." What does this reveal about the girl's character? Does this contribute to what happens to her in the end? Did the ending surprise you? What did you think of it?

#### *Mookie in Love*

5. Have you ever seen a family conspire against someone's relationship? When, if ever, would your family find a reason to do this? Describe the family of aunties when they get together. Do they remind you of your family in any way? How?

#### *Don't Be Disrespecting Me*

6. Discuss how one poor choice E made led to more. Was there a time he could have reversed the chain of events? Do you think E's mom was just clueless, or was she complicit in his mistakes?

*I Like White Boys*

7. Discuss this quote: "But do I only get to like boys that look like me? Or can I be like girls who look like Wendy, and get to pick any boy I want?" Where do you think Erika got her idea about what beauty is? Can these ideas and influences ever be overcome? How?

*Jacobs's Rules*

8. Would you like to see this experiment done in your own school? Why or why not? Who do you think learned the most from the experiment described in this story?

*Hunting for Boys*

9. What do you think it would be like to be a member of a strict church group like the Calvary Church of God's Blessed Example? Who do you think will stick to the rules and who will not? What makes you think this?

*A Letter to My Daughter*

10. Would you like to receive a letter like this from your own father? Why or why not? Do you agree with this father's opinions about who would make a good companion? Why or why not?