



Book Discussion Kit

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Last Updated: Friday, October 01, 2010

Paper Towns by John Green

Annotation:

Everyone's lives are interconnected, and Quentin and Margo find out just how similar and different they are in this complex novel about love and friendship and how not to run away from or miss the beauty in the people and places you might take for granted.

Ice Breakers and Activities:

Have paper, scissors and markers or crayons out and ask each participant to create a paper doll figure to represent themselves and discuss.

Discuss which paper town you might visit if you could and why ... or ask if anyone has every visited an abandoned building before and if, so, to describe the feelings they had inside it.

Radar's parents have an enormous collection of Black Santas. If you could collect something in massive quantities, what would it be and why? Do your parents have any collections that you're embarrassed by or do you know a friend who is embarrassed by his/her parent's collections?

Margo is interested in pulling pranks with the fish, shaving cream, etc. Does anyone have a favorite prank they've heard someone else pulled (or that they've done) that they'd like to talk about?

Who did you relate to (or like) the most in this book and why *or* if you could hang with any kid in the book who would it be? Why?

Read aloud pages 227-229 about the last day of school and the sick, sad feeling of packing up your locker. If you looked in your school locker right now, do you think you could easily throw away everything in it? If not, what would you keep and why? What do you think you'll miss the most and the least about high school?

Read aloud Quentin's thoughts about Margo's T-shirt, page 4: "...she wore white shorts and a pink T-shirt that featured a green dragon breathing a fire of orange glitter. It is difficult to explain how awesome I found this T-shirt at the time." Have you ever been fascinated by something so absurdly inexplicable?



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Play “That Guy is a Gigolo” as illustrated on pages 256-57.

Play “I Spy” or “Metaphysical I Spy” as played by the friends in “The Dreidel.”

Discussion Questions:

1. This book is broken into three parts:

- I. The Strings
- II. The Grass
- III. The Vessel

What did you think of the decision to structure the novel in these three parts? Did you like the structure? Why or why not? Also, the chapter headings in part three are named “Hour Six,” and “Hour Five” and so forth. Did you believe this structure intensified the last part of the novel in any way?

2. Read aloud the part of the book where Quentin calls the cop (page 151) and offers advice about not floating away. Do you think the cop offered good advice? Did he seemed at all burned out? In his advice, what did he say that made you conclude what you do about him?
3. On page 184, Lacey asks Q if he thinks she’s superficial? What do you think and how would you have answered that question?
4. Read aloud pages 198-199. “My dad finished chewing....” What are your thoughts about what the dad says here about showing someone how you feel? Is this a surprising thing for a psychiatrist to say?
5. Does anyone believe they have a friend who truly understands how they feel? How did this book change or affect they way you see your friendships?
6. What are your thoughts about Chuck Parson and how did your view of him change over the course of the novel?
7. Mirrors are a theme in this book. The word Spiegel is German for mirror; Margo’s last name is Spiegelman. Quentin’s father also refers to mirrors on page 198: “The longer I do my job, the more I realize that humans lack good mirrors. It’s so hard for anyone to show us how we look, and so hard for us to show anyone how we feel.” How was Margo a mirror for Q?



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8. On page 226, Q is emptying his locker thinking about the things he will never do again and the people he will never see again. Are there things and people that have been a part of your every day in high school that you take for granted and will miss?
9. On page 226, Whitman is quoted from *Leaves of Grass*, and subject of empathy is brought up – the idea of becoming a wounded person or another person.
10. What things does Quentin like about Margo? What things doesn't he like? What things surprise him about her? Is she only adventurous and beautiful in his eyes? Why do you suppose Margo didn't tell anyone how much she loved music?
11. What is Margo to Quentin? To Lacey? To the rest of the school? What does she become? What do you think of her?
12. Margo runs away and everyone has a perception that she's running away to something better, but is she? Do you think she'll continue to run away from things? Will she ever go back? Read page 234 about perpetual journeys and the secret of leaving.
13. Are there people like MARGO ROTH SPIEGELMAN that you put on a pedestal and don't really know?
14. Quentin and his buddies love to play games, and particularly a game called Resurrection. Do any of you know it? Do you think it's important whether or not you know what the object of the game is? Do you think the concept of resurrection is important in this novel?
15. On page 226, Q makes the decision to make Ahab in *Moby Dick* a hero. Ultimately Ben is a hero and he is a hero. In what ways do you think heroism is important in this novel? Who would you define as a hero and why?
16. Ben sees Lacey as a more "real" person and describes this to Q on pages 266-67. Do you think Ben has a point about how Q sees Margo?
17. Was it a surprise to you that Margo viewed Q as a paper boy? Why or why not?
18. Paper towns are defined on pg. 235. Having read this definition and considering the idea of fictitious friends and towns and identities, what do you think motivates Margo's actions? Do you think paper towns are negative or positive for her in helping her learn about herself? Do you think about the fictional works and characters on paper (books) had a positive impact on Margo?



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19. Read the humorous passages on pgs. 256 and 264 about the t-shirts for Radar. Besides having a great time, what do you think the friends on this trip learned about each other on their journey to find Margo?
20. On page 301, Q realizes how “interconnected” everyone’s lives are through what’s happening in his life and through reading *Leaves of Grass*. Are there any books, like Whitman’s, which have affected your life as greatly as it did Q’s and Margo’s?
21. This book has a lot of messages about the importance of understanding one another and the influence we each have on each other’s lives. In terms of being selfish and thinking of their own needs, how do you think Quentin and Margo were alike/similar?
22. What do you think of the title of this book? How do you think it relates to the story?
23. Study the covers of the book, front and back photo. Why do you think these different images of the two girls were chosen? Do you think the cover reflect the themes of the book? Do you think the book would has more girl or guy appeal with this cover?
24. What new ideas or thoughts did this book give you about your life or life in general?

Read Alikes and Books to Display:

Looking for Alaska and *Abundance of Katherines* by John Green
Will Grayson, Will Grayson by John Green and David Levithan
Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman
Rats Saw God by Rob Thomas
The Chocolate War by Robert Cormier
A Separate Peace by John Knowles
Moby Dick by Herman Melville
Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath
Slaughterhouse Five by Kurt Vonnegut
Selected Poems of Emily Dickinson (or any poetry by Emily Dickinson)

Reviews:

Booklist (Sunday , June 01, 2008):

Starred Review



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