

Discussion Guide

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Travis and his parents move to Bella Linda Terrace? Was this a good choice or a bad choice for them to have made? In what ways is their life better in the new neighborhood, and in what ways is it worse?
2. Why doesn't Travis want to confront his parents about their work schedules? What finally forces him to say something?
3. At various points throughout the story, Travis doubts Hil and his friendship. Why does Travis do this? Does Hil ever disappoint Travis?
4. Travis feels that reading books takes him from "normal life" to "real life." What does he mean by this? Does his reading cause any problems for him?
5. What sort of person is the librarian, Miss Babb? What does Travis have in common with her? What does she teach Travis?
6. Why is it so exciting for Travis to meet Ernest Oster? What makes Travis view Oster as a friend, instead of a famous writer?
7. How does Oster deal with the rejection of his second book? Why does he react this way? How does his method of dealing with failure compare to that of Miss Babb and the Save Our Library committee?
8. Are the members of the Salinas City Council bad people because they voted against the Save Our Library committee? What reasons do they give for closing the library? Is there something else they could have done?
9. Why isn't Travis afraid of Steinbeck's ghost, or of the other characters he sees? Is there any point where Travis—or Oster or Hil—is afraid?
10. What did Gitano, Johnny Bear, Steinbeck, and the others want from Travis, Oster, and Hil? Why is writing down the story so important to Oster, Travis, and Hil? Do you think this will satisfy Steinbeck and the others?

11. How does Travis change over the course of the story? Would he have described himself as a leader at the beginning?
12. Several times throughout the book, Travis thinks about what would happen if his life were a book (“If this were a book, he thought, I’d know by now who it was that was calling me.”—p. 234). Why do you think the author includes these statements? Do they affect your interpretation of the story?



Activities

13. Travis is drawn to Steinbeck’s writing because he grew up in Steinbeck’s hometown, but countless people have fallen in love with these works. Choose a short story or a novel by Steinbeck to read and discuss with someone else.
14. How is your local library funded? In times of economic hardship, libraries often feel the pain of budget cuts. Plan a creative fundraiser for your library, and help the librarians decide how to spend it.
15. It’s very important to the three friends that they each write down their version of what happened up in the mountains. Choose an important event from your life and write a story about it. If you can, choose an event that someone else shared with you, have them write their own story, and then compare the two.
16. Travis has a list of books that changed his life. What books made this big a difference in your life? Make a list, and share your list with others.



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