

*DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
THIS GIRL IS DIFFERENT
(Peachtree Publishers)
Book and questions © J.J. Johnson, 2012*

RELATIONSHIPS: LOVE, FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY:

Martha:

- Evie often stops Martha before she starts ranting. But Evie sometimes rants, too.
 - Do you think Evie recognizes this in herself?
 - Is her tendency to rant helpful, harmful-- or both (or neither)? How so?
 - What does it say about her personality?
- Evie and Martha “tell each other everything.” Modern psychology often warns against mothers and daughters being “friends” and/or becoming enmeshed.
 - Do you agree that this might be a problem for Evie? Why or why not?
 - In what ways are Evie and Martha equals? Is this valid, harmful, or both?
 - When does Martha act like a ‘mom’? When does Evie act like a ‘kid’? Do they ever reverse roles?

Rajas:

- Evie falls in love with Rajas, but breaks things off when she thinks he doesn’t stand up for her.
 - In what ways do you agree, or disagree, with Evie’s decision?
 - What would you have done, if you were Evie?
- Rajas says he doesn’t like labels. What are your thoughts about that? Is it a cop-out? Is it because he sees Evie as an equal? Is he scared? Is he above all the label stuff? Support your opinion with examples from the book
- In what ways does Evie and Rajas’ relationship seem realistic? Unrealistic?

Jacinda:

- Evie makes some snap judgments about Jacinda being a “girly girl,” but quickly changes her mind and decides that Jacinda is a smart, interesting person.
 - What were your first impressions of Jacinda? Did your view change during the course of the story?
- Evie’s been homeschooled up until now. How has lack of traditional schooling made it easier or more difficult to relate to other teenagers? In what ways do you think so?
 - How about adults? Does Evie seem more relaxed in the adult world? Why or why not?
- Evie and Jacinda become close friends and establish PLUTOs quickly. They have a massive fight, and ultimately forgive each other.
 - In what ways does their friendship ring true to your experience?
 - In what ways does it seem unrealistic?

SCHOOL / POWER

- Both Dr. Folger and Mr. Brookner are men in positions of power.
 - What type of power do they have? Is it earned, assigned, or taken?

- How do they wield their power?
 - In what ways do they use it similarly? In what ways do they use it differently?
- Mr. Brookner tells Evie that they are alike in that they both question authority and social constraints.
 - Do you agree with his assertion? In what ways are Evie and Mr. Brookner similar? Different?
- Mr. Brookner defends his relationship with Jacinda by saying that he “merely expresses interest in her thoughts” and that he told her they “must wait until graduation” to take their relationship further. We know what Evie, Rajas, and Martha think about the relationship.
 - What do you think about the relationship? Do you believe Jacinda and Brookner? How far do you think it’s gone?
 - How do you imagine Jacinda feels—and thinks—about it?
 - If Dr. Folger found out about the relationship, how would he react?
- Ms. Gliss singles out Marcie for having gained five pounds, and stares at some of the bigger girls in gym class when she talks about physical fitness. Evie calls this sizeism, and says it’s a form of oppression.
 - Do you agree that this is “sizeism?” Do you think it is a form of oppression? Why or why not?
 - Was the lightning strike against Ms. Gliss justified? Why or why not?
 - What if Ms. Gliss coached a sport like wrestling, in which athletes must meet certain weight requirements? Would that make a difference? Why or why not?
- Jacinda tells Evie that being on Cheer Squad, she has to deal with sexism a lot.
 - Do you experience sexism in your school?
 - What about the other ‘isms’: racism, elitism, ageism, authoritarianism, sizeism, homophobia, and religious intolerance? Do they occur in your school? In what ways?
- Evie is upset by the lightnings that say *Davina is a slut*, and *Scottie Swanson is a total fag* because they represent ‘isms’-- sexism and homophobia (heterosexism).
 - Do you share Evie’s belief that these are the worst lightning strikes? Why or why not?
- The PLUTOs Manifesto addresses systematic oppression: “*For example, teachers routinely show intolerance and disrespect toward students by yelling at us, embarrassing us, capriciously assigning detention. Can you imagine students yelling at teachers? We’d get detention for “insubordination!” That is just one example. Therefore, be it resolved, that our school is an oppressive system, and many of its members are complicit in enacting various forms of oppression.... Types of systemic oppression include, but are not limited to: racism, sexism, elitism, ageism, authoritarianism, sizeism, homophobia, and religious intolerance. ALL of them occur in our school.*”
 - In what ways is power necessary to create systematic oppression?
 - How do the powerful keep systematic oppression going?

- Evie thinks Jacinda's role as Cheer Squad Captain is a way for people in power to give Jacinda 'a stake' in the system, keep her buying into it, and thus discourage her from speaking out.
 - Does the notion of 'buying in' ring true in your life? In what ways is it beneficial to 'buy in' to the system? In what ways is it damaging?
 - In what ways do you face oppression? How do you resist it?
 - In what ways do you perpetuate oppression?
- Paulo Freire wrote, "*In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing ... The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence.*" -Pedagogy of the Oppressed (c) 1967.
 - What does the quote mean? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
 - Evie wants the school to be a "good democracy." What would a truly democratic school be like? How would decisions be made, and by whom? Would there be grades or tests? How would disciplinary action work? Would such a school be viable? Why or why not?
 - Dr. Folger promises weekly speak-outs for the students. Will this improve the school? Why or why not?
- Frederick Douglass said, "*To suppress free speech is a double wrong. It violates the rights of the hearer as well as those of the speaker.*" -Frederick Douglass, Abolitionist, orator, editor, author, and statesman, 1818-1895
 - What does this quote mean to you? Do you agree with it? Why or why not?
 - Is there ever a good reason NOT to allow free speech? For instance, "Bullying" or "Hate crimes"? What are your thoughts about this?

GENERAL

- Evie is interested in sustainable, holistic design and architecture. She has very strong reactions to the school building itself, calling it cold, industrial, lifeless.
 - If you were to invite Evie onto your own school's campus, what do you think she would see? What would she like and/or dislike?
 - What do you think about your school environment?
 - In what ways does your school environment suit your needs? In what ways could it be improved?
 - If you were to design a school campus, what features would you design?
- Evie feels most comfortable outdoors, and in the barn with Hannah Bramble. Where do you feel most comfortable?
- Evie has a canon of books, those she goes to "for comfort, or inspiration, or to know that someone out there feels the same things I do, knows the words, writes it down."
 - What books are in your personal canon?
 - What do you like about each book?
 - Are they very similar to each other, either in theme or style? What are their themes?
 - What do you love most about them?

- What books did you love as a little kid?
 - What books do you expect to love, even into adulthood or old age?
- Snakes are creatures with mythical history and symbolism. They appear three times in the story. What events do their appearances portend (foreshadow)? What do these events have in common?
- Each chapter has an epigraph (a quotation at the beginning of a book, chapter, etc.).
 - Which quotes were your favorites? In what ways did they speak to you?
 - Were there any you thought were way off base? How so?