

*The Storied Life of AJ Fikry* - Socratic Seminar Questions

We will be having a Socratic seminar on your summer reading, *The Storied Life of AJ Fikry*. A Socratic Seminar is a conversation between students to open-ended questions about the text. It will be your responsibility to prepare for the Socratic Seminar by writing down full answers text support for what you believe to be the answers to these questions, and then during the seminar, respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to "paraphrase" essential elements of another's ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement. Please note that this prep work will be collected for credit, so please detail your thoughts carefully and include page numbers for support.

NOTE: You DO NOT need to complete these before the first day of class. We will have time during the first week of class to work on them.

1. The author chooses to begin each chapter with a description of a short story. Discuss some of the ways the stories relate to the chapters with which they are paired. Is A.J. creating a canon (list of sacred books) for Maya? How does the book itself function as a kind of canon? If these are A.J.'s favorites, what do they say about A.J. as a reader and as a man?
2. Why do you think Gabrielle Zevin chose to set the book on an island? How does the island setting reflect A.J.'s character?
3. "We agree to be disappointed sometimes so that we can be exhilarated every now and again." What are some of the examples of this quote in action in the book? Do you agree with it?
4. Perhaps oddly, vampires are a recurring motif in the story: for example, when A.J.'s wife throws the vampire prom and when A.J. watches *True Blood* to court Amelia. What do you make of the references to vampires?
5. At one point, Maya speculates that perhaps "your whole life is determined by what store you get left in". Is it the people or the place that makes the difference? Do you think she was destined to become a writer from the very beginning or do you think it was the influence of the adults in her life?
6. Amelia and A.J. have a unique courtship. What makes them compatible?
7. A.J. is disdainful of popular books & television until he forces himself to try them for Maya and Amelia (children's books & "True Blood"). Is "popular" something we should consider "bad" or "wrong"? Why do you think AJ feels this way? What is your reaction to the latest popular hit--eager to try it or actively avoid it?
8. Respond to this quote: "The things we respond to at twenty are not necessarily the same things we'll respond to at forty and vice versa. This is true in books and also in life."
9. Lambiase moves from an occasional or non-reader, to a reader, to a bookseller. How do you think becoming a reader changes him?
10. At one point, A.J. asks Maya, "Is a twist less satisfying if you know it's coming? Is a twist that you can't predict symptomatic of bad construction?" What do you think of this quote in relation to the book? Did you guess who Maya's father was? If so, what were the clues?
11. How do you think the arrival of the e-reader is related to the conclusion of the story? Is A.J. a man who cannot exist in a world with e-books or do you think he eventually would have made peace with them? Do you agree with A.J.?
12. What do you think the future holds for physical books and bookstores?