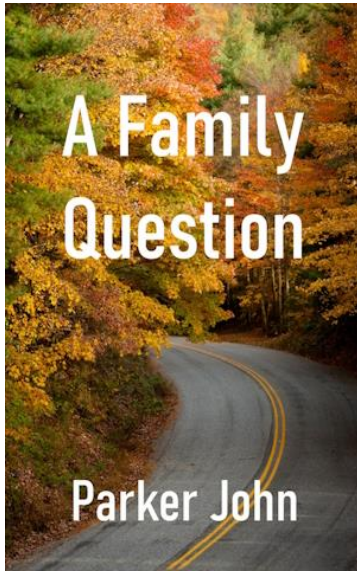


DISCUSSION GUIDE



Jake Novak, 17, is depressed and secretly starting to drink. His mother died of breast cancer. His kid sister is acting out in bizarre ways. His dad is starting to brood and grow distant. Is anything ever going to get better? Why does his life have to be so lousy? Jake could use some answers. He gets them from the mysterious Rolly Jones, who insists on their meeting, of all places, on a golf course. Jake gets 18 answers to any 18 questions. And every one of them is true. He learns things he can never unlearn, including a shocking family secret. He even learns about his future and nearly breaks down at the horrible and seemingly inevitable things to come. But before his final answer, Rolly helps Jake alter his path in life—and the destiny of his family.

FOCUS: ANNOYING SIBLINGS

Jake Novak has a younger sister, Amanda. During his time on the golf course with Rolly Jones, Jake reveals more and more about how much of a pain she has been and how oddly she has been behaving. Jake and Rolly both observe it when Amanda and her father show up.

Discuss: Talk about how siblings can be mean to each other when they are actually trying to show that they care. Find examples in the text that show how Amanda behaves around Jake, especially the really strange behaviors. Some are described by Jake. Some are demonstrated when Amanda shows up. Is crying in her father's chest one of them? After the story is over, and Jake and Amanda drive home, do you think her behavior towards him will change? How about his behavior towards her?

FOCUS: PERSONAL CHANGE

Jake met Rolly and tolerated the strange request to go golfing because he desperately wanted answers. But maybe he wasn't just interested in answers: maybe what he was really interested in were changes for the better, once he learned the truth. His motivation seemed to be curiosity at the beginning of the story, but near the end it was for something much more.

Discuss: Talk about where in the story Jake changes. Summarize the whole story in terms of his need to learn so that he could change—himself, his life, his world. Just before the end of his round of golf, Jake does something that abruptly changes everything. Is this realistic? Can a simple mental exercise lead to permanent change? Advanced activity: learn a bit about Neuro Linguistic Programming.

FOCUS: WHY A GOLF COURSE?

It wasn't a location he chose; it was chosen for him. Maybe the fact that he didn't feel out of place on a golf course helped him decide to actually go meet Mr. Jones. To most people, a golf course is an odd place to meet and talk about terribly serious things, but it became rather well suited to Jake's quest for answers.

Discuss: Talk about why this story took place on a golf course. How did this setting help move the plot along? Golf is typically played with a break after nine holes. Was this convenient for the story? The setting also includes Fall foliage. How might this relate to Jake's story?

FOCUS: GUARDIAN ANGELS

Many stories feature guardian angels. Rolly Jones does things that Jake would not have believed possible if he had not experienced them for himself. Rolly knows things. Important things. And he's there to help. Some would say he is definitely a guardian angel for those who want answers.

Discuss: Talk about how Rolly Jones can be viewed as a guardian angel. Find examples in the text that show this. If Rolly Jones is a guardian angel, then maybe he reports to a higher authority. Describe how this is evident in what Rolly says about himself. Does Rolly grow to like Jake more as the story proceeds? Would he really have quit if Jake hadn't agreed to play by the rules?

FOCUS: FAMILY MATTERS

Jake and Rolly are the main characters. Or are they? Jake's family is a large part of what he wants to get answers about. He asks about his mom, his dad, and his sister. He learns some things about his father that would be devastating to anyone.

Discuss: Think about how Mr. Novak can be viewed as a main character in the story. Summarize the whole story in terms of how Mr. Novak is present in Jake's thoughts and words and deeds. If you were Jake's dad, seeing what happened in the parking lot at the end of the story, how would you react? How do you think most fathers would react?

FOCUS: WHO IS THIS GUY?

Rolly Jones seems to be someone out of time. He came out of nowhere and disappeared the same way. Jake is repeatedly baffled by the strangeness of the man. Readers are given clues, but it's never really clear where, or when, Rolly came from. Is an angel earning his wings?

Discuss: Think about the story as if Rolly Jones were a time traveler. Find examples in the text of how this is shown for his clothing, his possessions, the phrases he uses, and the things he doesn't understand. Does his name suggest that his character might be based on a real person? Research and explain how he could be a combination of the three top finishers in the 1928 US Open golf tournament.