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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Paper Towns

by

John Green

(New York: Dutton Books, c2008.)

Author:

John Green is the celebrated author of Printzmedalist *Looking for Alaska* and the Printz Honor Book *An Abundance of Katherines*. Both books have been finalists for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize, received many starred reviews, and been placed on numerous state award lists. John’s work has been translated into eleven languages.



He has been a commentator on National Public Radio’s “All Things Considered” and reviewed books for publications, including *The New York Times* and *Booklist*. John was also one half (with his brother, Hank) of the enormously popular video project *Brotherhood 2.0*, which has been watched more than 10 million times. Although John grew up amid the subdivisions and theme parks of Orlando, he now lives with his wife, Sarah, in Indiana. [From Dutton Children’s Books: Speak]

Summary:

Quentin Jacobsen has spent a lifetime loving the magnificently adventurous Margo Roth Spiegelman from afar. So when she cracks open a window and climbs back into his life—dressed like a ninja and summoning him for an ingenious campaign of revenge—he follows.

After their all-nighter ends and a new day breaks, Q arrives at school to discover that Margo, always an enigma, has now become a mystery. But Q soon learns that there are clues—and they’re for him. Urged down a disconnected path, the closer he gets, the less Q sees of the girl he thought he knew. With nothing left to guide him but a seemingly random collection of maps, books, online entries, and an annotated copy of Walt Whitman’s *Leave of Grass*, Q and his friends must find Margo and unpeel the ever-changing layers of meaning behind her “paper towns.” [From Dutton Children’s Books: Speak]

Questions:

1. When Margo and Quentin are nine they make a horrible discovery, and in very different ways. Quentin says, “As I took those two steps back, Margo took two equally small and quiet steps forward” (p.5). Do these descriptions still apply to the characters when they reach high school? When the story ends? What changes?

2. Describe Q's best friends. Where do they fit into the caste system of Winter Park High? If you had to choose one of these characters as your best friend who would you pick? Why?
3. How does Quentin struggle at times with his friendship with Ben? How does Q learn to accept Ben for who he is? How does this relate to Q's changing understanding of Margo?
4. Why do you think Margo picks Q as her accomplice on her campaign of revenge?
5. Do you think the characters Margo targets for revenge get what they deserve? Does Lacey deserve to be included?
6. When Margo disappears after her outing with Q, it's not the first time she's seemingly vanished for a long period. Describe Margo's other adventures and note any common threads between the trips. What makes her disappearance after her night with Q different from the others?
7. When Margo disappears, she's always been known to leave "a bit of a bread crumb trail". What clues does Margo leave for Quentin? How are these different from clues left previously?
8. Do you think Margo wants to be found? Do you think Margo wants to be found by Q?
9. Why does Quentin begin to believe that Margo may have committed suicide? What clues make this seem like a viable solution to the mystery of her whereabouts?
10. Describe Q's tour of the various abandoned subdivisions he visits on his quest to find Margo. How are they different? How might these differences parallel the evolution of Q's search?
11. Discuss what Q finds in the abandoned minimall and how the book contributes both to the plot of the story and to what he ultimately learns about Margo and about himself.
12. Discuss the road trip to find Margo. What are the most important events along the way? How does this adventure mirror the one Margo and Quentin had in the beginning of the book? Compare and contrast the two.
13. Discuss the scene where Q finally finds Margo. How does her reaction to seeing her friends make you feel? Do you believe that she didn't want Q to come after her?
14. Why do you think Q makes the decision he does at the end of the book? Do you agree with his decision to turn down Margo's invitation?

15. The definition of a “paper town” changes many times in the book. Describe the evolution of its meaning. How does it relate to the mystery? To the themes of the book?
16. With which character’s version of the “real” Margo do you most agree?
17. Do you think that Margo meant to give her friends a false impression of her true self?
18. Q’s parents describe people as “mirrors” and “windows” (page 199). What does this mean? Do you agree with this metaphor?
19. Q comes to this conclusion (p. 199): “Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl.” Discuss.
20. The book is divided into three sections: The Strings; The Grass; and The Vessel. What is the connection between the sections/titles and the content within those sections? How do the sections/titles connect to the themes of the book?
21. Which philosophy of life do you most agree with: Margo’s Strings? Whitman’s Grass? Or Q’s Cracked Vessel? Why?
22. At different times, both Margo and Q use lines of poetry without considering the context of the whole poem. How do you think this changes the meaning?

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