



## **5** Questions to Ask Your Kids About *Any* Book ...instead of “did you like it?”

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# READ-ALLOUD REVIVAL

## How to Use this Guide...

**We've all done it... asked the one question that absolutely guarantees to kill the conversation.**

The problem isn't the book, our enthusiasm, or our kids. The problem is the question.

"Did you like it?" can only be answered in one of two ways, and neither of those is going to get you where you want to go (that is, into a meaningful discussion with your kids!)

**So how do we spur on those meaningful conversations?**

How do we get past "did you like it" and into a worthwhile dialogue? Is it even possible, if we've never really had good conversations with *anyone* about books before? If we've never learned the questions that will serve best?

Yes.

**In this guide, you'll find five questions you can ask about any book.**

The questions will help you plunge past the surface and into the thick of a good discussion.

You can ask these questions about any book you read. If it's a story, it will work.

For each of the five questions, you'll see three examples of those questions in action - a picture book, a middle grade novel, and piece of literature more suitable to high schoolers.

These questions are open-ended and all-around awesome, so you can literally pluck any book off your shelf and use these questions to help you dig into the story in a meaningful way.

**I can't wait to hear what you think after you give it a try!**

xO,  
Sarah Mackenzie

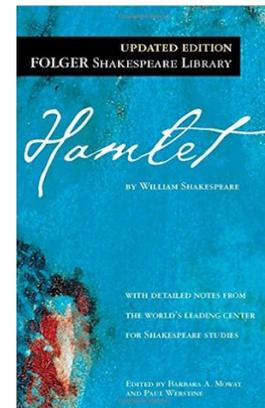
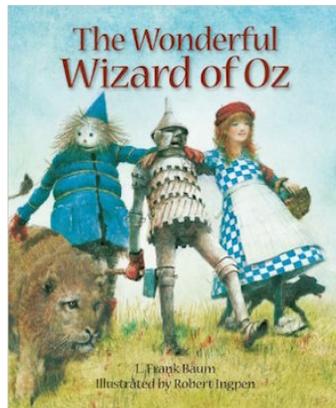
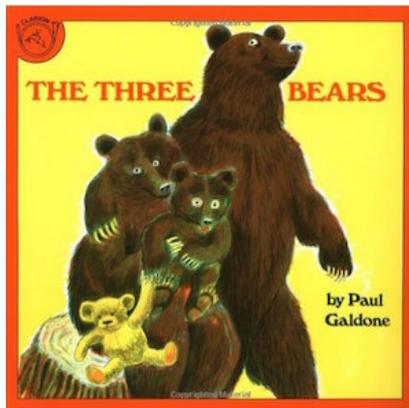
## Book Selections

**These questions will work for any book or story you come across.**

You can use them when watching movies or commercials, when listening to audio books, or when reading to yourself. If there's a storyline, these questions can help you.

For the purpose of this guide, I'll use the following books to demonstrate how the questions can be used across a spectrum of ages and reading abilities:

- **Picture Book Example:** *The Three Bears* (Paul Galdone)
- **Middle Grade Novel Example:** *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
- **High School Literature Example:** *Hamlet*



## The Questions:

### 1. Should he have done that?

You'll be surprised at how much fun this question is to ask! The answers might *seem* obvious on the surface, but as soon as you dive in, you'll see that you're in a goldmine.

If your child comes back immediately with a "yes" or a "no," dig a little deeper and ask "why?" or "why not?"

You can't mess this one up- there is no one right *should* question for each story. Pick any decision that a character has made and ask if he or she should have done it. So simple!

- ▶ Should Goldilocks have entered the three bears' cottage?
- ▶ Should Dorothy seek the Wizard's help?
- ▶ Should Hamlet avenge the ghost?

### 2. How is x like y?

Everything in the world is like everything else. Everything in the world is also different from everything else.

Begin to consider how something is like something else or different from something else, and you're well on your way to some of the best thinking you'll ever do. You'll also find you're making connections about everything under the sun.

- ▶ How is Goldilocks like Baby Bear?
- ▶ How is Dorothy like the Wonderful Wizard?
- ▶ How is Prince Hamlet like Claudius?

### 3. How is x different from y?

This is a good one to ask if you get stuck on question #2. It's almost always an easier one to answer! You can ask the same question as you did with #2, or you can ask an entirely new one.

- ▶ How is Goldilocks different from Baby Bear?  
Or... how is Goldilocks like Papa Bear?
- ▶ How is Dorothy different from the Wonderful Wizard?  
Or... how is Dorothy different from The Cowardly Lion?
- ▶ How is Prince Hamlet different from Claudius?  
Or... how is Prince Hamlet different from Ophelia?

### 4. Who was the most ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) in this story?

Insert any single character trait into the blank space. You'll probably need to follow this question up with "what makes you say that?" or "can you give me an example?"

**Here are some character traits to get you started:**

*noble, brave, cowardly, bright, demanding, determined, nervous, careful, calm, dangerous, grateful, obnoxious, naughty, proud, charming, cautious, considerate, foolish, wise, friendly, capable, greedy, generous, mysterious, pleasant, creative, bold, loving, sharp-witted, thoughtful, unselfish, witty, sad, happy, hard-working, virtuous, restless, intelligent, humorous...*

- ▶ Who was most foolish in this story?
- ▶ Who was most courageous in this story?
- ▶ Who was the most honorable in this story?

**Another way to ask this question is simply to ask if a character had a particular trait:**

- ▶ Was Goldilocks foolish?
- ▶ Was Dorothy courageous?
- ▶ Was Prince Hamlet honorable?

Make sure to follow this one up with a "what makes you say so?" That sends the reader right back to the text for an answer, which is exactly our goal!

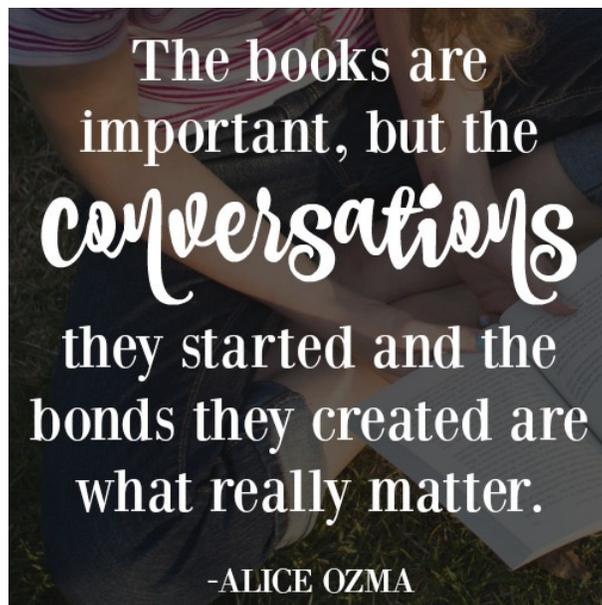
# READ-ALOUD REVIVAL

## 5. Which other story does this remind you of?

This question is easier to ask once you've been in the habit of asking questions and having conversations with your kids about books you're reading together. Remember, everything in the world is like everything else— at least a little bit!

You can suggest one if your child can't think of one, and then ask questions #2 and #3 about how those stories are alike and different to get you going.

- ▶ How is the story of *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* like the story of the *Three Little Kittens*?
- ▶ How is *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* like *Mary Poppins*?
- ▶ How is *Hamlet* like *Pride and Prejudice*?



# READ-ALLOUD REVIVAL

## Quick tips:

- **Remember: we aren't quizzing for comprehension here!**

Make this friendly and conversational. Pretend you're asking a grown-up — we have a tendency to speak in a condescending/teaching tone to our children, even when we don't mean to.

Act like you're having a conversation with one of your friends about a book. Actually, that's *exactly* what you're doing.

- **Don't recoil if your child gives an answer you don't like.**

If you ask "Should Goldilocks have entered the cottage?", and your son answers with a resounding "yes!", be stoic. Don't let him see if you disagree! Just ask him why.

*Truth is truth is truth.* You'll get there, no matter how many rabbit trails you take along the way. Let your children think for themselves to uncover truth in all the secret places it hides.

- **If you get a one-word answer, ask your child to support it.**

Don't roll your eyes or sigh (that never helps) (ask me how I know). Instead, follow up with another question.

For example, if you ask your child, "How is Pooh like the honey tree?" and you get "he's not" in response, then ask how they're different. Or suggest an answer, and then see if your child can come up with another. "Hmmm.... well, it seems to me like both Pooh and the honey tree attract bees." Offer an option and see where it takes you.

- **There are oodles of other good questions to ask- these are just the beginning!**

What you want to do is avoid specific questions that are more like quizzes on your child's comprehension and less like conversation starters. You don't need comprehension questions at all if you know how to ask a good question.

If your kids can have a great discussion with you on the virtues of a character in a book, or if they can give you a good comparison of two characters or events in the story, then they comprehended what they read. :)

# READ-ALOUD REVIVAL

- **Don't build this up in your head.**

You don't need just the right atmosphere or just the right book or just the right moment. **Do it today, no matter what the circumstances.** If you're in the car with your child on the way home from a basketball game, ask. If you're cleaning up the kitchen after dinner, ask. If you're folding laundry and your kids are within earshot - that's a great time. :)

If you make *Conversations about Literature* a thing, they'll never happen, so just jump in and make it a part of your normal conversation.

- **Keep in mind that every discussion doesn't have to be the best one you've ever had.**

It doesn't even have to be great. It's okay if you ask your child one of these questions and it's just a ho-hum kind of discussion. **Nothing is fireworks and fanfare every day.**

Try again tomorrow with another question and another book. Don't be discouraged. We are dealing with humans here - and our interactions with humans rarely match the ideal we've created inside our heads.

The fact is, one of those ho-hum conversations could be one that strikes a deep chord within your child that he or she remembers well into adulthood.

- **Don't wait!**

I think you'll be amazed at how simple having really good conversations about books can be. It's not a secret formula that you have to follow to the letter.

You don't need a long list of questions or even a great understanding of the book. **Just start with a question and see where it takes you.**

Go do this right now and see what happens! No more procrastinating ...

**You have everything you need to have a  
fantastic conversation with your kids.**

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