

Discussion Questions for Reading Groups

A Hero Dreams

Spoiler Alert:

The questions below contain spoilers to the book.

1. In Chapter 1, Ricky recalls his father advising him to have faith in himself and follow his heart, regardless of the opinions of others. Does he follow this advice? To what extent are his choices determined by fear? How does this change after he crosses the threshold?
2. What does the “threshold” symbolize? Why does Ricky’s decision to cross the threshold represent such a critical moment in his journey?
3. Life is a dream. How does this theme reveal itself in *A Hero Dreams*? We get a preview of the next book at the end of Chapter 10 when Ricky wakes on an unfamiliar shore. Discuss ways in which this theme might develop in the remaining books of the *Hero’s Path* series.
4. Ricky seems to have the ability to see things other people cannot. Are his visions the product of an overactive imagination? Are they part of a dreamworld created by his subconscious? Is something supernatural happening? To what extent, if any, does the supernatural play a role in your life? How much of what you encounter each day falls into the “unexplained” category?
5. One of Ricky’s most powerful visions occurs when he observes Spencer and his gang plotting to kill him. We learn later that this secret meeting was real. Why did Ricky dismiss this vision as “just a dream”? Was it simply too horrifying to face? At what point does he begin to believe in his visions?
6. In the prologue, Ricky’s angel tells him: “Something’s wrong. And together, we’re going to make it right.” To what is she referring? Is she confirming his belief that something’s wrong with him? Or is she referring to something else? If so, what?
7. Why does Ricky believe there’s something wrong with him, that he’s defective, that he doesn’t deserve to be happy? Where do such feelings of unworthiness come from? Isn’t happiness our birthright?
8. The death of Ricky’s father leaves him feeling abandoned and alone in the world. Two years go by and he feels “worse, not better.” Why do you think he takes his father’s death so hard? Compare how the two Williamson brothers deal with this tragedy.
9. Have you ever experienced the loss of a loved one? In what ways did you respond similarly to Ricky? How was your experience different?

10. Discuss Ricky's relationship with Danny. On more than one occasion, he proclaims his hatred for his younger brother. How does he really feel about Danny? How does he feel about himself?
11. The story told by the three novels in the *Hero's Path* series closely follows the narrative pattern first introduced by the celebrated 20th century scholar of comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell. This pattern has become known as "the hero's journey." In what sense is Ricky a hero? In what sense is each of us a hero? Does one have to perform a heroic deed to be considered a hero?
12. What role do heroes play in today's world? Who are the modern day heroes? What values do they exemplify? Were they born heroes or did circumstances elevate them to hero status? Who are your heroes?
13. Discuss the scene in which Ricky teases Sam during their hike along the mountainside. Why would Ricky behave in such an unheroic manner? Is it because he wants to belong to the cool kids' club? Or is something else going on? Have you ever done something you knew was wrong, yet felt powerless to stop yourself?
14. Discuss the scene in which Sam forgives Ricky. Why do you think forgiveness comes so easily to Sam? Is Sam a saint? An angel? Is it significant that he's deaf?
15. Discuss Ricky's dilemma between wanting to be Miles's friend and his desire to be accepted by the others at camp.
16. After the attack at the pond, Ricky wakes and finds himself covered by a hunting jacket. Then, he looks up and finds his clothes folded neatly on the dock. How do you think they got that way? Hint: More than one explanation is possible here.
17. Although Ricky knows how to swim, he apparently never got past the trauma of almost drowning when he was a little boy. Discuss his fear of the water. What are your greatest fears? What is the source of those fears? Is it possible to overcome them?
18. What does the heart-shaped stone symbolize? What's the significance of Ricky taking the stone with him on his journey?
19. Why do you think the author chose to describe the attack at the pond in such graphic detail? Describe your reaction to the attack. Do you think we live in a violent society? If so, is change possible?
20. Consider the following quote: "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars." Martin Luther King Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967). Do you agree? If so, can the cycle be broken? How?

21. Discuss the culture of bullying at Camp Abenaki Valley. Why do kids bully each other? Is it learned behavior? Is it innate?
22. Henry Hatfield is introduced to us as a mean-spirited bully. Describe how he changes after the night at the pond. Does he become a sympathetic character? Does he redeem himself?
23. Spencer Black seems to be a purely evil character with few, if any, redeeming qualities. But is he? In Book 2 of the series, we will learn some things about his past that might cause us to reconsider our view. Speculate what these things might be.
24. Is Spencer's conduct unforgiveable? Is it possible to forgive a person without condoning their behavior?
25. Often pain and suffering lead to growth. Is this true in Ricky's case? Do you think he's adequately prepared for his journey into the future where he will meet a man "in desperate need of (his) help"?