

 SCHOLASTIC

50 Fabulous Discussion-Prompt Cards for Reading Groups

Snap-Apart Question Cards That Build Comprehension & Spark
Great Discussions About Character, Plot, Setting, Theme & More

By **Laura Robb**



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INTRODUCTION

The Benefits of Discussion Prompt Cards

During my first five years of teaching, I devoted long hours to composing discussion questions for each novel students read together. One day a student asked, “Why can’t we have questions that work for any book?” With that, my teaching life changed, and the seeds for this book were planted. I began writing open-ended questions on index cards and handing them out like a deck of cards to groups of students. They loved choosing their questions from this stack, and their enthusiasm for book discussion skyrocketed.



These easy-to-use question cards work for any fiction or nonfiction book or story. While students independently talk about books, you’ll gain time to work with individuals, pairs, or small groups who require extra guidance. The cards come to the rescue of student discussion groups that are having difficulty valuing diverse ideas, or gathering evidence from their books, or focusing on the discussion. What follows are

ideas for organizing and managing student-led discussions, tips for using the cards, and prompts that students can use to jump-start stalled discussions.

Ideas for Organizing Groups

Is there a golden rule for how many students should be in a group? I recommend that they discuss books in pairs or in small groups of three to five. You can form groups based on:

The Same Book: All students read and discuss a single title.

Different Books: The teacher has multiple copies of different titles and offers sets of the same title to pairs or groups. A variation is to tap the school’s and classroom’s libraries collection so that every student reads a different title.

An Author Study: Different groups read and discuss different titles by the same author.

A Genre Study: Every group reads and discusses books of the same genre, such as mystery, historical fiction, or biography. (Each student can read a different title, or each group can read a different title.)

A Theme Study: Every group reads and discusses books of a common theme, such as peer pressure or friendship.

Independent Reading Books: Invite students to bring their completed indepen-

dent reading books to school on a specific day. In my class, students decide on a book of their choice to discuss once every six weeks. This activity takes two thirty-minute classes.

Ahead of Time: Teacher Tips

- Print and laminate the cards so you will have them for a long time. Before laminating, write the card category on the back of each card (character, nonfiction, role play, etc.).
- Decide on how many weekly student-led discussions you want. I schedule them two to three times a week for 25–30 minutes, which includes 5–10 minutes of prep time (see next bullet).
- Schedule enough prep time for students to select a card, skim their books, take notes, and think about the points they want to make. Without this, discussions can be a disaster. This “think” time can occur right before the discussion or on the previous day, depending upon your needs.

Card-Selection Ideas

Over the course of the school year, give students lots of choices for using the cards. Generally speaking, each student works with at least one question per discussion.

Here are some ways to use them during student-led discussions:

- The teacher selects a category for the whole class, such as Character or Theme. Each student in the group chooses one question from this category.
- The teacher chooses the category and questions for each pair or group.

- Each group chooses the category and questions.
- Each group chooses a single question to discuss.
- Students choose a “mystery” card from a category or from the entire deck. If the question won’t work for a student’s book, another card is chosen.

Key Management Tips

1. Explain Pre-discussion Responsibilities.

Let students know that it’s up to them to make sure each question they’ve chosen or have been given can apply to their books. If the question does not apply, they should choose a different card.

Encourage them to take notes on the questions to bring to the discussion. Students can skim books for specific details and jot these down in their journals. They should note the page number so they can read a passage aloud to prove a point.

2. Give Guidelines to the Group Leader.

(Rotate this job so all students can experience leading a discussion.)

- The leader opens by asking everyone if they have completed the reading.
- The leader reads the question(s) and invites students to discuss.
- The leader uses the discussion prompts (see page 6, number 8) to move the conversation forward.





3. Set Behavior Guidelines. Organize students into small groups and invite them to suggest five to six behaviors that foster productive discussions. Together, the class should decide upon the best advice and post it on chart paper for reference. For example:

- Read the assigned pages.
- Be a good listener.
- Value different ideas.
- Use your book to support ideas.
- Bring your book, a pencil, and response journal.
- Try to participate.

Reread behavior guidelines before students start discussing. Reminding students of the guidelines helps them recall and apply the standards they set.

4. Establish a Cue for Silence. Agree on a cue such as flicking the lights to alert students that noise levels are escalating.

5. Be Up Front With Consequences. Consider the consequences of being unprepared for a book discussion. In my class,

unprepared students read the pages in class before joining their group.

6. Explain Post-discussion Choices to Students. Help groups who have completed their discussion early to continue working quietly. On the chalkboard, list two to three choices, such as: Summarize the high points of the discussion in a journal, read independently, or work on a piece of writing.

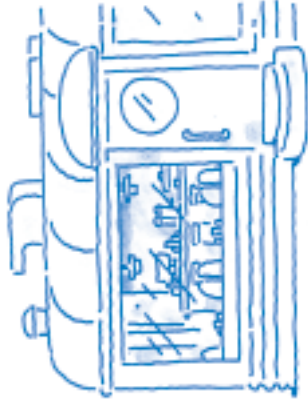
7. Make the Rounds. Circulate among groups; listen to and validate what's working. Support groups that need additional guidance to keep a conversation going by using the prompts listed below. Spotlight what is working well so others can learn from peers' successes. Note groups who might benefit from your guidance.

8. Discussion Prompts. Sometimes students have great difficulty sustaining a discussion. Everyone takes turns saying something, but there's no give and take—no real conversation—because other members don't comment or react. The following prompts can help students learn to elaborate on a question or offer an opposing view.

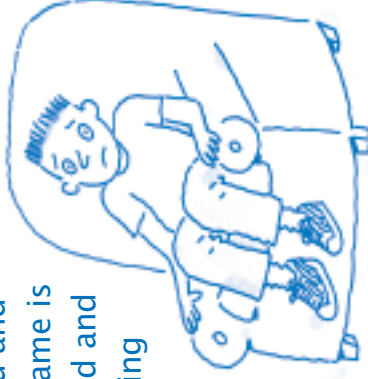
- Can you give support from the story?
- Does anyone have something to add?
- Does anyone have a different idea?
- Can you connect this book to other books?
- Can you connect a character or an event to your life?
- Did the discussion raise a question? What is it?

#1/Character**Heart-to-Heart**

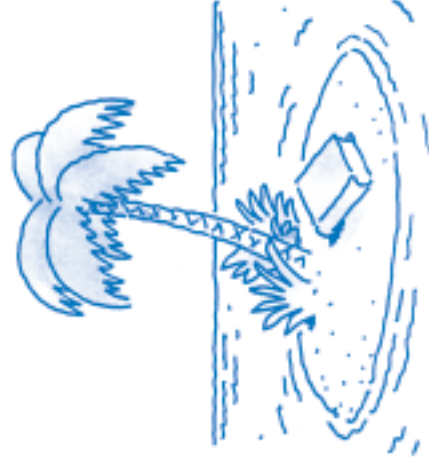
The main character wants to meet you at the local diner to talk about everything he or she has been going through. Think about conflicts this character faces. Then tell the main character what you think about how he or she handles them, and what you consider to be his or her greatest strength—and his or her greatest fear or flaw.

**#2/Character****Mood Clues**

Mad? You slam a door. Hurt? You cry or run away. Sad? You slump your shoulders. What you say and do communicates your mood and even your personality. The same is true for book characters. Find and discuss two character-revealing passages, and explain what each taught you about that character's feelings, motivations, and personality traits.

**#3/Character****Choose a Character**

Discuss this! If you had to be stranded on a deserted island with any character in this book, who would it be? Why? Who would be your last pick? Why?

**#4/Character****Movie Tag Line**

You've been hired to write a one-sentence ad to promote the movie version of this book. With your group, come up with a single sentence that conveys what the main character faces, and what he or she discovers about himself or herself or about others.



#5/Character

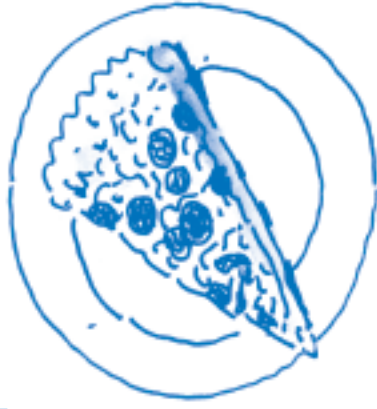
Show Me the Support

As a group, discuss several adjectives that describe the main character and pick the best one. Then scan the book for a line or a passage that proves you right. Take a vote on which section provides the strongest evidence.

**#6/Character**

Minor Character

Imagine you are having pizza with one of the minor characters in your book. Think about how this character would view a conflict that the main character faced and how they would have solved it. Discuss from the minor character's point of view.

**#7/Character**

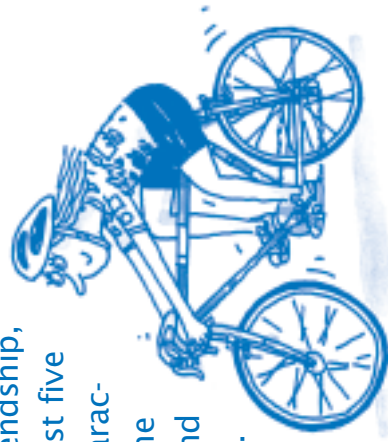
Unsolvable!

The main character of your book has problems that he or she couldn't solve. Choose two unsolvable problems, explain how the main character deals with each and why each one is impossible to resolve.

**#8/Character**

Favorite Things

List things you cherish in life, such as free time, in-line skating, a friendship, or a favorite sport. Now list five to six things the main character values. Discuss how the plot helped you understand what the character values. Then compare your values to the character's.



#9/Theme

What's Up?

A news reporter is interviewing you about issues you've observed between friends and families at school and in your neighborhood.

What are some problems you might discuss? Does your book address any of these? Explain the connections between your book and any problems you identify.

**#10/Theme**

Make It a Bestseller

You're an editor who has to come up with a new title for your book. Think about the novel's characters, problems, settings, events,

and themes. Create an effective new title that will entice people to read the book. Be ready to explain why you think it reflects the book's main idea so well.

**#11/Theme**

Talk-Show Question

You are the author. In front of millions of TV viewers, a famous

talk-show host asks you: "So do you think people are basically good-hearted or basically selfish?" Based on the characters in this novel, what would you answer? Discuss.

**#12/Theme**

Pick a Theme

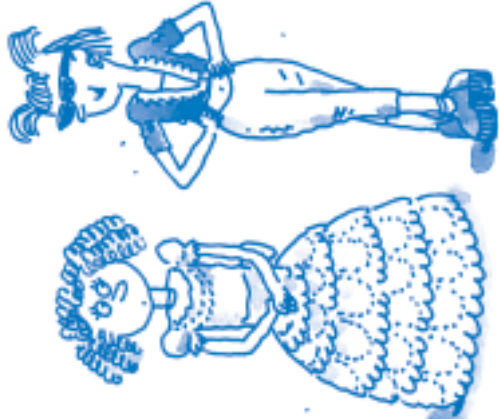
Discuss what the author seems to be saying about one of these topics or themes: behavior, friendship, family members, poverty, prejudice, survival, hope, peer pressure, illness, handicaps, talent. Then take turns sharing your own views of these things.



#13/Setting

Past, Present, Future

In this book are the characters living in the past, the future, or do they remain in the present time? What did you learn about the time period? Do you think the world is better or worse off now?

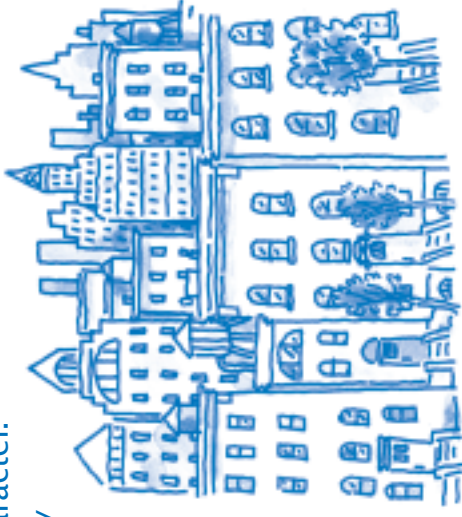


#14/Setting

Important Scenes

Pick your favorite character.

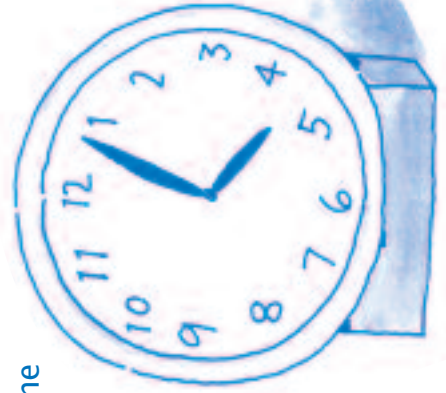
Which settings deeply affect the character's decisions and feelings? Which create problems? Identify two or three settings and clearly explain the impact each has on the character.



#15/Setting

Clues About Time

Reflect on how much time passes in your book. Skimming the text, find and discuss passages that show how the author makes time move.



#16/Setting

You Are There!

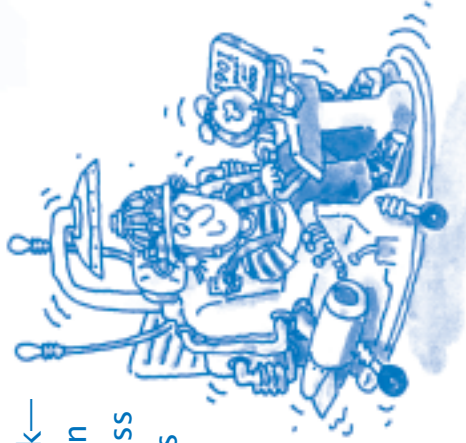
Sometimes an author describes a place with so much detail that you can see, hear, smell, and feel what that place is like. Find a scene that involves several of your senses. Read it to your partner or group, and discuss the words and phrases that stirred each sense.



#17/Story Structure

Time Travel

Find examples of flashback—when the story jumps to an earlier point in time. Discuss what you learned from this switch in time. Then discuss which words signaled to you that you were in a different point in the character's life.



Page Turners

Did the author leave you dangling from a cliff at the end of each chapter? Discuss three or four of your favorite cliff-hangers and explain why each made you think, *I've just got to read the next chapter!*



#18/Story Structure

#19/Story Structure

Find the Drama

What emotions did the story make you feel? Did you feel nervous? fearful? excited? worried? angry? Take turns sharing a passage that roused your emotions. Read it aloud, and then point to the words, phrases, and events that stirred a specific feeling.



Hint, Hint

Foreshadowing is a technique authors use to build suspense. It's a detail that hints of something to come. Point out several places where the author uses this technique. Is the clue so obvious it makes you realize what is going to happen, or does it just make you curious?



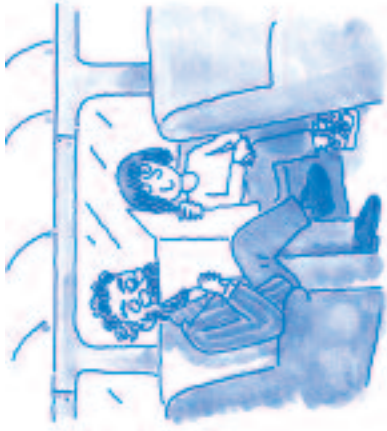
#20/Story Structure

#21/Personal Connections

Who Interests You?

You board a train and discover you have the choice of sitting next to the main character or another character in the book.

With whom would you choose to talk? Why? What would you like to ask the character? What would you tell him or her? (Remember, you don't have to choose the most admirable character.)



Favorite Passage

Is there a moment in the book that reminded you of something you've done or felt? Find the passage and read it aloud. Explain why you connected to it and how the passage is important to the story.

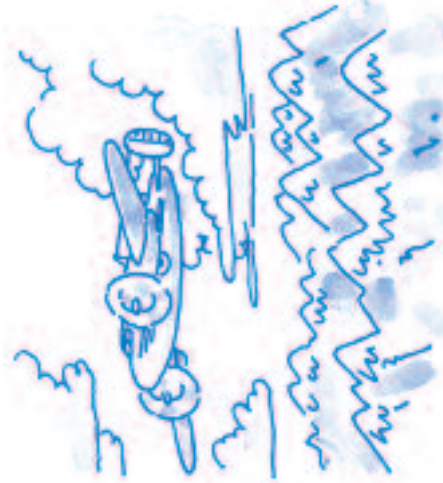


#22/Personal Connections

#23/Personal Connections

Desired Destinations

Is there a setting that made you think, *I've been there* or *I'd love to go there*? Discuss the settings you connected to and explain why you relate to them.



Comparing Decisions

Review some recent decisions you have made and compare these to decisions made by a character in your book. How are these decisions alike? different? Discuss why the outcomes are the same or why they are different.



#24/Personal Connections

#25/Personal Connections

Creating Mood

You are directing a play based on this book. Your lighting director asks you to choose a color to help create the mood of the opening scene. First discuss and define the mood, and then pick a color. What associations do you have with this color that made it your choice?

**#26/Personal Connections**

Making Connections

Did the titles of other books or movies pop into your head as you read this book? Share these titles, and explain why you think they remind you of the book.

**#27/Personal Connections**

Writing Ideas

Read as a writer. Skim your book, and look for words and phrases that you might want to adapt to your writing. Jot these down, and share five or six, and explain why each one appealed to you.

**#28/Personal Connections**

New Kid in Town

The main character is moving to your town. Will he or she fit in? Why or why not? How are his or her values and tastes different from—or the same as—those of your hometown?



#29/Making Inferences

Dialogue Detective

Read aloud a section of dialogue that taught you a lot about the characters who are conversing.

Explain how you interpreted their words, inner thoughts, and author's comments to infer personality, feelings, and motivation.



#30/Making Inferences

Be the Character!

Read aloud a favorite scene or section of dialogue. Now imagine you are that character, and suddenly a fairy godmother appears and kindly asks you to express everything you are thinking and feeling and why. Free-associate as though you are the character! Do other students interpret the scene the same way?



#31/Making Inferences

Actions Speak Louder

It's fair to say that what you do shows others what kind of person you are. From a book character's actions, we decide if he or she is courageous, sneaky, lazy, hardheaded, and so on. Choose a character, and pick three to four of his or her actions. Discuss what they may reveal about the character's personality.



#32/Making Inferences

Be an Actor

Ready to show what you know about characters' motivations? Select a section of your book that's rich in dialogue. Read it aloud, adjusting your voice for the different characters so that you reveal each character's personality and emotions. Invite your partner or the group to infer opinions about the characters from your reading.



#33/Nonfiction

What Grabbed You?

What about this book says, “Read me!” Is it the topic? photographs? author? other special features? Discuss these book features.



#34/Nonfiction

Vital Information

The museum has asked you to fill a glass exhibit case with information on the topic of your book. Which three facts or ideas from this book would you want museum-goers to know? Why? Which three photographs or illustrations would you choose to display? Are there any other artistic facts you’d include?

#35/Nonfiction

Biographies

Why do authors write biographies about people? Ponder this question and discuss why you think the person you read about is the subject of a book.



#36/Nonfiction

What You See

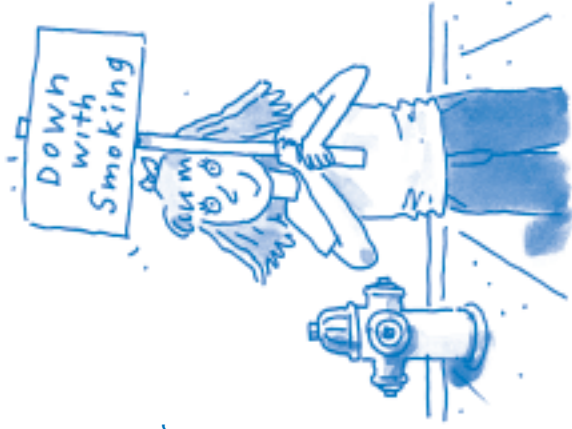
Take a visual stroll through your book. Share the charts, diagrams, and illustrations with your partner or group. Explain what you learned from each and how each is important to the topic.



#37/Nonfiction

Mind Bender

Did this book change your thinking about the topic? How? Why? Is there one section that particularly swayed your view?



#38/Nonfiction

Are You Inspired?

Did this book make you want to take action in some way? Discuss ways in which you could use what you learned from this book to improve something in the world.



#39/Nonfiction

Hidden Agendas

Stop! Skim! Think! Not all information in nonfiction books is factual. Did the author of your book weave opinions into facts? Skim to find examples of facts and opinions and share these.



#40/Nonfiction

Vocabulary Swap

Words! Words! Words! We need them to think and to understand information. What new and/or unusual words did you learn? Discuss three.



#41/Role Play

Meaningful Moment

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Take a moment to reflect on your life and experiences. Consider the events you found most meaningful, then pick the most important one. Tell me, why was it such a key moment?"



#42/Role Play

Role Model

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Okay, tell it to me straight: When you think about all that you've experienced, which person influenced your decisions the most? Why?"



#43/Role Play

Second Thoughts

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Don't get me wrong, I liked the way things turned out, but if you could change one event in your life, which would it be? Why?"



#44/Role Play

We All Make Mistakes

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Do you feel that you made some poor decisions along the way? Tell the audience about a couple of these, and why you believe each was the wrong decision."



#45/Role Play

Star Bright

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Okay, the question on everyone's mind is: What actor would play you in the movie version? Explain the qualities you are looking for."



#46/Role Play

Predicting the Future

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "So now that you've made it through all that you have, what's next for you? Where do you see yourself in five or ten years? Why?"



#47/Role Play

Low Point

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "What fears or worries keep you up at night? What was the lowest point in your life?"



#48/Role Play

Get to Know Me

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "Who in your life do you feel understood you the least? How did he or she come to understand you better?"



#49/Role Play

Shining Moment

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "All of us experience events that stay in our hearts and minds forever. Please share the most memorable moment in your life. Explain why it's so important to you."



#50/Role Play

Finest Quality

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "What do you consider to be your best quality? Can you think of a time when this quality shone through?"



#51/Role Play

Decisions, Decisions

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk-Show Host: "There are decisions that cause sleepless nights and take a long time to work through because they are so difficult. Tell us about two tough decisions you had to make. Why did you struggle making each?"



#52/Role Play

Remember Me!

Answer this question from a main character's point of view.

Talk Show Host: "What do you want readers, 100 years from now, to know about your life? What should we, in the present, learn from your story?"

