

Lucy in Between

by Sarah Callender

Discussion Questions

Parent–Child Book Clubs

A Note on These Questions

These discussion questions are designed to open and inspire conversations. There are no right answers here—only honest ones. Each set includes optional connections to Pablo Neruda’s *The Book of Questions*, the collection of poems that winds through Lucy’s story. Neruda’s questions are unanswerable by design; they invite wonder rather than resolution. So do these.

Lucy in Between deals with loss, grief, suicide, mental health, family rupture, and the slow, uneven work of healing. Some questions may bring up personal feelings or memories. That’s okay. Communities—whether classrooms, families, or book clubs—grow closer when they make room for the hard (and the beautiful) stuff of life.

A note on content: this novel depicts suicide and its aftermath with care and honesty. If any reader needs support, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988 in the US) is available 24/7.

Discussion Questions

Parent–Child Book Clubs

These questions are designed for parents and children to explore together—not to arrive at the same answer, but to find out what people of different ages think, feel, and believe. The best conversations here won’t be tidy. They’ll be the ones where someone says something that surprises the other person.

Note for parents: *Lucy in Between* handles suicide and grief honestly. It may bring up questions or feelings your child has been carrying.

Starting the Conversation

1. What did you think about Lucy from the very first page? Did you like her right away, or did it take time? Or, did she irritate you throughout the story? Why? [Compare your answers—they might be different, and that’s interesting.]

2. Have you ever felt, like Lucy, that someone else in your family was getting more attention or was seen as more important? What did that feel like? How did you handle it?
3. Lucy's mother is not a villain—she's a parent who loves her children and is also struggling, flawed, and sometimes absent in the ways that matter most. Parents: Have you ever felt like you were failing your child even when you were trying hard or doing your best under particular circumstances? Kids: When have you witnessed (or sensed) a parent's or guardian's struggles or imperfections? Is seeing this "human" side of them helpful? Uncomfortable? Frustrating? Why?
4. Lucy's father leaves the family to explore professional passions but wants the opportunity to reconnect with them. What are your observations and opinions of him as a parent? What do you each think about second chances—in families, in friendships, in general? Is forgiveness always possible, or are some things too big to forgive? If so, what are some specific "unforgivable" things?
5. What are the risks and rewards of forgiveness, and how do we know when forgiveness is worth the risk? Consider the characters in *Lucy in Between*—Lucy, her mother and father, Henry, Charles Chatterjee, Tia, and Janet Willow, the "mean girl." Who should be forgiven and why?

About Grief & Mental Health

6. Henry's depression is confusing to Lucy because, from the outside, his life looks enviable. When have you (or others in your life) seemed fine but were not fine at all? Why did you (or others) believe that everything was fine when that was not the case? What did you wish people understood about recognizing, noticing, and seeing pain that is largely invisible?
7. After Henry dies, both Lucy and her mother grieve in very different ways. What does Lucy's lack of tears, at least initially, suggest or illustrate about grief? How healthy, helpful, or surprising is Lucy's mother's way of grieving throughout the book? How does her way of grieving affect your feelings about her?
8. Lucy feels guilty after Henry's death—as if she should have seen, said, or done something more. Is guilt a normal part of grief? What would you say to someone—a friend, or yourself—who is carrying that kind of guilt?

Love, Friendship & In-Between

9. Lucy's friendship with Charles starts shifting into something more confusing—and then he starts liking someone else. Parents: think back to your first experience of unrequited feelings. How did you feel at the time, and how do you feel about it now? Kids: how do you think Lucy should have handled that situation? How would you have handled it?
10. In Peru, Ernesto becomes a kind of anchor for Lucy—more present and nurturing than her own parents during this crisis. Has anyone outside your immediate family ever played an unexpectedly important role for you? A teacher, a neighbor, a friend's parent? What was the impact, and why was this particular person impactful or helpful?
11. In *The Book of Questions*, Neruda asks questions that really have no clear answer. What question would you ask, right now, that you genuinely don't know the answer to—about your family, your life, or the future?

The Bigger Picture

12. Janet Willow and The Ellas aren't exactly bullies, but they do impact Lucy's life. Why are "mean girls" present in every generation and every culture? What might explain why some teens are kind and thoughtful, and others are the opposite?
13. By the end, Lucy is still in the middle of things—her family hasn't been magically fixed, and she's still figuring out a lot. Does this ending feel honest to you, or did you want more resolution? What do you think happens next for her, both in her family and in her relationships with friends?
14. *Lucy in Between* takes Lucy from Seattle to Peru—a physical journey that mirrors her inner one. Have you ever traveled somewhere and come back feeling different? Or is there a place you dream of going that feels like it holds something you need?
15. If you could say one thing to Sarah Callender about her book—a question, a reaction, a comment, or a "why did you do that?" what would it be? Check to see if she has an author visit program or a contact page (she does!). Why not reach out to her and share your questions, feelings, and opinions?