



Book club 17: Identity & belonging

Pony
by R.J. Palacio

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *Pony* by R.J. Palacio in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story. Each group member consults the group about elements of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is where you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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Pony

Introduction

'I have gotten used to a variety of mysteries in my life, to be sure. That I have grown up with a companion no one else can see is one. That I have visions and hear the voices of people no longer alive in this world is another. That I have been marked by lightning, and lived to tell of it, is a third. So I guess I have come to expect a degree of uncertainty in my life, young as I am.'

Silas Bird is a gifted boy, who lives a quiet life together with his father and his companion Mittenwool - who happens to be a ghost - until, in the dead of night, three strangers come to take his father away. Silas is left feeling scared and alone, until a pony shows up at his house. Somehow, Silas knows what to do, which is to go on an adventure to rescue his father from the bandits who took him.

Pony by R.J. Palacio is a historical adventure novel about many things all at once: love, courage and self-discovery. Above all, it makes you think about how people can interact with beings that are not human, and how people can understand the (invisible) creatures and worlds surrounding them.

Round 1: Understanding the plot

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

Round 2: Initial questions

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (fragmenten/stukjes) from the book listed below. Think of a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. Silas thinks about the day he was born: 'I know... home again.' (p. 25-26)
2. Silas explains the agreement with his dad and Mittenwool: 'I should... about me.' (p. 68-69)
3. Marshal Farmer and Silas differ in their views of the past: 'Marshal Farmer... I yelled.' (p. 87-89)

Round 3: Discussion

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Opinion

Review *Pony* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

Why is Martin Bird taken away by the bandits?

Question 2

Why does Silas bring a violin with him when he goes after his dad?

Question 3

What kind of photo contest do Silas and his dad enter together?

Question 4

With whom is Silas going to live at the end of the story?

Question 5

Who are all the dead people that Silas encounters in the valley?

Answers

- 1 Because they are hoping he can figure out a way to print fake money.
- 2 The violin belonged to his mother and is the only object Silas has left of her.
- 3 They enter a photo contest to take 'the best lunar picture'.
- 4 Silas is going to live with Sheriff Desimonde Chalfont.
- 5 They are most likely the ghosts of the settlers and native Americans.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

Read the quote in the introduction of this book club. Silas is a special boy with many gifts and talents. Which of Silas' abilities would you most like to have and why? How would it help you in your life if you had this ability?

Personal connections? 2

Silas is homeschooled by his dad because his teacher gave him a rap on the knuckles for being 'a strange boy who believes in ghosts'. How did his father's decision impact Silas' life in a positive and a negative way? How would you if your parents decided to homeschool you?

Personal connections? 3

Silas and his dad enter a photo contest for the best lunar picture. However, Silas accidentally destroys the picture. Dad responds with calmness: 'It was never really about the exhibition, or the prize money, right? What really matters is, we did it.' Why do you think he finds it more important that they 'did it'? How would you respond if you were Silas' dad?

Personal connections? 4

Silas' best friend is the ghost Mittenwool, who can't be seen by other people. Did you ever have an invisible (e.g. imaginary) friend when you were younger? And do you still have them?

Personal connections? 5

In Silas' eyes, why is Ollerenshaw less human than the ghosts he has encountered? Do you agree with Silas? Why (not)? What does 'being human' mean to you?

Personal connections? 6

At the end of the story, Silas goes to live with Jenny and Desimonde: 'I had come home. Maybe not to the place I'd left, but to the place I was meant to be.' What do you think Silas finds that he hasn't experienced in a long time, or maybe ever experienced at all? Explain how you would feel if you were in Silas' shoes.



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4



Food for thought? 1

The events in book start on the evening that Silas' father is taken away by the riders, but when does the story really start? Why did the author choose for the book to begin at this point in the story, do you think?

Food for thought? 2

Two important characters in the story are not human. Why is Silas so attracted to these characters? Which character is the most important for Silas' development into adulthood and why?

Food for thought? 3

'[I] found myself wondering where all the water came from. Probably some itty-bitty spring somewhere miles away [...] I'm sure Pa would say that this is how everything in the world begins: with a trickle. A trickle of an idea, a trickle of rain on an acorn. *Only love and lightning come all at once.*' What does Silas' dad mean? To which events in the story can this be related?

Food for thought? 4

Silas' father and mother have very different backgrounds, which is one of the reasons for them falling out with Silas' mum's parents. When Silas recalls the story of how his parents met he finds solace in it: 'There are stories we hold near in times of darkness and this one is mine.' Why does Silas find solace in this story?

Food for thought? 5

Silas' father is called Martin Bird. Roscoe Ollerenshaw is looking for a famous counterfeiter called Mac Boat. Do you believe Martin Bird and Mac Boat are the same person? Give two reasons why or why not.

Food for thought? 6

'I have already mentioned Mittenwool is a ghost, but I'm not entirely sure that's the right word for him. Spirit. Apparition. Fact is, I don't know what the right word for him is, exactly. Pa thinks he's an imaginary friend or some such thing, but I know that's not what he is.' What could be a plausible explanation for Silas' ability to see people like Mittenwool?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4