

**Teacher's and Reader's Guide  
(Teacher's Projects Below)**

**Questions For Discussion:**

**Chapters 1-6**

1. What is the first magazine that Samuel, Jesse, and Jonathon discover? What kind of magazine is this and what does it say about the three boys interests? Do you think such a magazine should be accessible for teens? Why?
2. Do you think the three boy's behavior at the bike jumps had anything to do with why the Mexican's stole Jesse, Jonathon, and Samuel's bikes? If Jonathon, Jesse, and Samuel had acted friendlier do you think the Mexican's still would have stolen their bicycles?
3. How is prejudice used in the early stages of conflict between Jonathon, Jesse, and Samuel and the Mexicans?
4. What particular topics of the Bible is the father focusing on in on page 11? Is the Bible the only place where this topic is brought up? What other religions discuss this topic? Can you link the message on this particular page, and the father's thoughts, to what has just happened to Samuel and the Mexicans?
5. Samuel's grandmother is obviously prejudiced, but do her prejudices reflect the difficulties in her life or are they misplaced?
6. When Samuel's mother says on pg. 17, "This isn't like all those other books your father has written." What does she mean?
7. What is Samuel's father explanation for building a cross? Is he trying to prove something to Samuel's mother or himself?
8. How does Samuel's mother react when she sees the cross? How does she respond when Mark Gerard quotes the Bible in his defense? What does her response say about her feelings about the Bible and for her husband's behavior?
9. On page 26, what exactly is Mark Gerard asking his wife to "trust?"
10. Explain the use of "irony" in the story of Samuel's grandfather on page 32.

11. Does Samuel's quote from his Social Studies textbook prove or disprove that he understands his father's story?
12. How does the father's story of prayer on page 35 differ from the mother's on page 49? Is this difference reflected throughout the book and if so where?
13. On page 40, are Jonathon and Jesse *really* fighting about their Atari or is it about something else?

### Chapters 6-11

14. On page 47 Samuel says that he is proud of his father because, "He had stuck to his beliefs." Explain what this means.
15. Which particular adjectives of Cynthia and Christine's house tell us that they are wealthier? What particular adjectives do you hear today that signify wealth (think of *MTV Cribs* or *My Super Sweet 16*)?
16. On page 58, Samuel compares the state of the Mexican's house to the previous owners. What is the connection and what is the difference? How do you think Samuel's grandmother would have reacted to the previous tenants? Compare and contrast the difference between the Mexican's home and Cynthia and Christine's.
17. What does "televised hysteria" mean and why does Samuel wind up locking "every window and door?"
18. Why does Saula go from being one of the best students to someone "who knew just what it took to pass?" How does her home life affect her studies? Do you think this transition from good to poor student due to her home circumstances is accurate?
19. What do you think about Samuel's conversation with his father on the day of his birthday party? Look carefully at what is said. What does the dialogue convey Samuel's feelings at the moment? His feelings about his father's? If you could rewrite the whole dialogue in terms of what is NOT being said, how would it read?
20. How does Samuel's "useful" present actually make itself "useful" this time around?

21. Why do you think the Mexican's fathers speak to the police officers differently than Jonathon's father? What does this say about how the police are viewed in different communities?
22. Over the course of the novel, how does Samuel's behavior change toward the dogs? Why do you think he becomes nicer? What influences, outside of the dogs themselves, do you think bring about this change?
23. Read how Samuel's mother describes "good" and "bad." How do you describe someone who is "good" and someone who is "bad?" Is "evil" the same as "bad" in your opinion?
24. What is the grandmother's opinion about the word "nice?" How do you think she has come to form this opinion?
25. After the grandmother has her stroke, she reacts toward the African-American nurses in a way that shocks Samuel and his mother. How is her behavior different? What is the irony here?

## **Chapters 11-16**

26. On Page 89, Jonathon says, "I didn't know Mexicans listened to heavy metal." What does his surprise at this discovery tell us about his understanding of the Mexicans?
27. On page 90, why does Samuel's mother smile after she says that she feels bad about putting her mother in a nursing home?
28. Why does Jonathon refer to the "Alamo" as the three boys are boarding the bus? What significance does this event have for someone prejudiced against Mexicans? Some people have encouraged lawmakers to make "Remember the Alamo" a Texas-state slogan. How do you think Mexican-Americans might feel about this? Is this a responsible slogan in a Democracy? Explain.
29. Samuel feels invincible when he gets a Chinese throwing star. Have you ever met someone who has changed when they possessed a weapon? How did they change?
30. On page 96, why is Samuel's mother so distraught about her own mother's change in behavior?

31. Compared to her initial encounter with Mr. Roosevelt, how does Saula change when she has a switchblade?
32. What does Saula's older sister's behavior say about her feelings as a guardian of her younger sister? Cite specific examples in your explanation.
33. Why does Ronald Reagan have such a different effect on everyone Samuel encounters? Do modern day presidents have the same effect?
34. On page 104, Samuel describes a Bronco player who has a reputation for violence. Is the Bronco player really punished or rewarded for his poor sportsmanship?
35. On page 106, during the bloody fight with the Mexicans, Samuel says: "It felt good. Hitting. I had wanted to punch someone since my father left. But punching a wall or a door only hurt me in the end. Sitting on top of someone and punching away, hurting him, listening to the sounds he made, when he couldn't do anything back..." Who is Samuel's real enemy here? Is it the Mexicans or something or someone else?
36. Samuel is very self-assured after his fight with the Mexicans. Why would winning a fight change his attitude toward everyone and everything around him? In your opinion, is his self-assurance sustainable or temporary?
37. Is Saula really angry that Samuel has "snitched" or is her anger really aimed at something else?
38. On page 112, when Samuel looks in the mirror and says, "White Devil," what does he mean by this? Is Samuel's interpretation of his father's story about his great-grandfather correct? Are there parallels?
39. What is Alimony and why is Samuel's mother opposed to it? Does her stance fit her character? How?

## **Chapter 16-22**

40. In the end of Hamlet, almost all of the characters die. However, the conflict in the play begins with a single act of violence, Hamlet's Uncle killing his brother. If

you could trace the all the conflict in The Book of Samuel to one single act of violence, what would it be?

41. Samuel believes that Saul is evil, but on page 121, he says of her: "...evil that was lying on the floor beneath me, her face wet with tears." Why does he mention her tears?
42. What particular things has Samuel's mother done, in her eyes, to raise her son under pacifistic ideas and what has led her to believe that he won't be violent?
43. On Page 125, Samuel says: "Something collapsed inside my mother." What specifically has collapsed?
44. When Samuel takes a trip with his mother to the mountains, he is only concerned with how slow the car is going, but after being in the mountains for the day, he: "no longer cared that we were the slowest ones on the road." Why would that be?
45. What are at least four ways Wayne and Samuel have similar personalities? Different personalities? Do you think Wayne is a good influence on Samuel?
46. By page 131, how have Samuel and his grandmother's point-of-view on race reversed?
47. How are Uncle Rhoald and Junior different? Similar? And how have their strong opinions affected those around them?
48. Why is Samuel excited to have David live with them? How does Samuel's mother view her son's excitement?
49. How does Samuel describe his experience with other races at Columbus? How does Samuel's mother react when Samuel talks about who is on Honor Roll? Why does she seem disappointed?
50. In the car, what is the argument between David and Samuel's mother really about? In your opinion, who wins? Why?
51. What is David's relationship with Uncle Rhoald like? Do they have personal issues with one another or does the conflict stem from something else? Explain.
52. What is the first thing that Jonathon and Jesse notice about David? How does Samuel react to their observation? Where does the prejudice lie within their dialogue?

53. As Jonathon explains his story about his father's car accident with the Mexicans, do you think this justifies his hatred or is it just an excuse? If so, how far do you think it is fair to take revenge? If not, what particular part of the story *really* upsets Jonathon?
54. On page 158, Jonathon says that Samuel "Scared of them. Scared of everyone?" Do you think this is why Samuel chooses not to fight or is there another reason. If so, what is it? Is choosing not to fight back a sign of weakness in your own opinion?
55. What present does Saula give Samuel? Why do you think she gives him a gift at all? What do you think this is symbolic of? Is her present adequate compensation for what she has done to Samuel?
56. What is David's explanation of why he became friends with Paco? What does Samuel think about this explanation?
57. On page 166, why do you think the nursing home has such a traumatizing effect on Samuel? What does it say about the importance of living one's life responsibly and fully?

### **Chapters 22-27**

58. In the old days, according to the assembly at Samuel's school, what leveled the playing field for black cowboys?
59. What is the *real* reason David hits Saula with a bat? Is he mad at Saula or at something else? What does Saula represent in David's mind? Is his aggression justified?
60. On page 179, what is the connection between what Samuel has discovered in his father's notebooks and what has just happened between David and Saula?
61. Why is Samuel so angry at his mother during the dinner that David has prepared?
62. What is David's plan for toughening up Samuel? Why is he doing this to his little cousin?

63. On page 194, why does Samuel open the gate to let the Rottweilers free? Is this a reaction to what he has just experienced at the mall? What is his motivation for doing this?
64. On page 197 Samuel thinks, “By now I saw something in David’s face that I had seen in my grandmother, in Saula, and most recently in Jonathon. It wasn’t hatred. Nor was it anger, but something even deeper . . .” What is it that Samuel sees? In your opinion, what is deeper than anger and hatred?
65. Why are the Rottweilers so obedient with Geronimo? What is the connection between Geronimo and these dogs?
66. On page 203, how is Saula’s behavior different than in the past? Why do you think she acts like this?
67. Samuel’s mother says, “This is not the country your mother emigrated to. It’s more like the country she left.” What does she mean by this? Why is this coming up just then, with David’s behavior?
68. What does Samuel’s mother say about ‘the past?’ Do you agree with her opinion? Do you think it is fair?
69. Samuel has wanted designer clothes for so long, but the reaction he gets when he finally is wearing Izod is very different than what he had anticipated. Has Samuel learned a lesson? What is it?

### **Chapters 27-33**

70. How has Samuel’s father influenced Wayne? What is the irony here?
71. Who first suggests that everyone should stop fighting, Samuel or Paco? How does Samuel react and why do you think he reacts the way he does?
72. How long has Samuel’s father been back before he comes to the house? Why do you think he waited so long? How does this affect Samuel?
73. What is the relationship between Samuel’s mother and father after he has returned from his trip?

74. On page 230, Samuel's father says that he doesn't know "which is worse," the A-Team or the Christian Pledge-a-thon. In his mind, how is he comparing the two? What do you think specifically bothers him?
75. Why does Samuel's father say that "no one in this country is listening?" Does he mean listening to him or listening in general? And what are they not listening to?
76. What does Samuel's father see in the frozen waterfall? How is what he sees symbolic of neglect?
77. After playing basketball, Jonathon and Samuel have a discussion about forgiveness. What has inspired Samuel to talk to Jonathon about forgiveness? Does Jonathon listen? How does the conversation end?
78. On page 255, Samuel says he feels, "perfectly at peace." Why? Is it climbing the mountain of snow or talking with his grandmother or something else?
79. In the end when Samuel says: "People do not need to be saved. They are already saved," what does this mean? And do you think it only means "saved" in a religious sense or in another way?
80. How is the father's behavior at the end of the novel similar to his interaction with Geronimo?
81. Do you think Samuel makes a wise choice at the end, by sacrificing himself? Do his actions speak louder than words?

### **Projects for Teachers:**

1. Map out the different characters and their relationship to one another, much like a family tree. Then locate where a certain conflict begins (such as the with the bicycles), with whom it begins, and how it ripples out to the other characters. How many characters are affected per any one conflict? Is any single character, besides Samuel, affected more than the others? What does this say about how conflict spreads?
2. Create your own map (much like the one on [www.thebookofsamuel.com](http://www.thebookofsamuel.com)) of your neighborhood. Think carefully about who lives where. Does race or economics make any difference in the make-up of your neighborhood? Where do you think your neighborhood ends and another begins? How do you distinguish a boundary?

3. What are the different stages of group conflict? Chart the different stages of Jonathon's anger toward Mexicans. Where does it begin and how does it end? With each new stage, how does Jonathon express his anger? In Jonathon's eyes, are the Mexicans viewed as individuals or as a group? How are they viewed in Samuel's eyes, in Jesse's eyes, and in David's eyes? How does viewing the Mexican's as either individuals or as a group intensify or diminish racial conflict?

4. What are the different stages of individual conflict? Chart the events of the conflict between Saula and Samuel. How does it begin? How does it end? Where is the "tipping point" in their conflict and how does it change the balance of power?

5. Think about a recent events that sparked off a series of violence. How did the event begin? How did it end? Did the resulting violence lead to a peaceful resolution? Were there different stages and who was affected and how?

6. How does Samuel's attitude toward the Rottweilers change. Chart the different steps he takes toward reconciliation. What do you think prompts this change in his behavior?