

# Discussion Questions for "The Rope Walk"

Discussion Questions Developed by the All Iowa Reads Committee

1. The Rope Walk is told from ten-year-old Alice's point of view. Talk about the ways Carrie Brown makes this believable. Is she successful? How did telling the story from a child's point of view add or detract from your enjoyment of the novel?
2. Alice and Theo are different both in personality and experience and, yet, they develop an intense friendship. How are Alice and Theo alike and how are they different? How do Kenneth's mobile gifts match the characters of each? How do you account for their almost instant empathy for each other?
3. Although Alice's mother is dead and Theo's is absent, both mothers are a part of the story. How and why is that?
4. Theo seems tough and "world wise" whereas Alice is dreamy and sensitive. In what ways is this characterization of Theo and Alice true and in what ways not true?
5. Talk about the way Carrie Brown underscores the innocence of Theo and Alice's relationship. Do you see any glimmers of romantic love? Do you think Theo and Alice's relationship will continue?
6. After her birthday party, Alice is marked by a hailstone in the same way her mother had been. Alice is overcome with the feeling that she will be faced with a test. Talk about the test or tests Alice ultimately faces.
7. Alice refers to her maturing self as a "new person who was dragging her into the future . . . restless, unhappy, frightened, a crybaby." (pg. 231) What were your "coming of age" feelings and experiences?
8. The Rope Walk explores the relationships between adults and children. Talk about Alice's relationship with her father Archie, her adult brothers, housekeeper Elizabeth, O'Brien and Helen, Kenneth and Hope Fitzgerald. What do we learn about each of these characters when we see them through Alice's eyes, and in what ways do we, from our adult vantage point, see them differently than Alice?
9. Many children have close relationships with adults who are not members of their family. Talk about an important relationship, either positive or negative, you remember from your childhood.
10. At the opening of the book, Alice takes pictures with an imaginary camera. At the book's end, Alice finds and begins using her mother's camera. Talk about the way this progression from imaginary to real parallels the story The Rope Walk tells.
11. The Rope Walk's language is rich and evocative. Talk about some of your favorite passages. How does Brown's use of Shakespearian quotations and of the Lewis and Clark journal figure in?
12. The dictionary definition of a rope walk is "a long path devoted to the manufacture of rope." Alice's birthday rope walk was meant to be untangled in order to find prizes at the end. Theo and Alice devised Kenneth's rope walk as a gift. How are these various rope walks alike or different? Why do you think Carrie Brown chose a rope walk as the image around which she built her novel?
13. Why do you think Archie blamed Alice and Theo, ten-year-old children, for Kenneth Fitzgerald's death? Was he wrong to send Theo away? How is Archie and Alice's relationship changed?
14. Do you think Hope deliberately hid Kenneth's suicide letter? Why or why not? Why didn't Alice tell Archie when she, at last, found the letter – especially since she readily shared its contents with Theo?
15. Talk about your experience of reading The Rope Walk.