

GUIDED READING QUESTIONS FOR THE GLASS CASTLE

Due on the day you return to school in September, 2009

1. The first story Walls tells of her childhood is that of burning herself severely at age three, and of her father taking her away from the hospital. Why do you think she opens with that story? How does it set the stage for the rest of the memoir?
2. Rex Walls often asks his children, "Have I ever let you down?" Why was this question, and its required response, so important to him and to his children? On what occasions does he actually not let them down?
3. Jeannette's mother insists that, no matter what, "life with your father was never boring." What kind of man is Rex Walls? What were his strengths and weaknesses, his flaws and contradictions?
4. Discuss the type of person Rose Mary Walls is. What do you think of her description of herself as an "excitement addict"?
5. Although it portrays an incredibly difficult life, The Glass Castle is not sad or self-pitying. Explain what you think is the tone of the book, and discuss how Walls achieves this effect.
6. Describe Jeannette's relationships with her siblings. Discuss the roles they play in each others' lives.
7. In college, Jeannette is singled out by a professor as not understanding the plight of homeless people. Instead of defending herself, she keeps quiet. Why do you think she does this?
8. The two major sections of the memoir, one set in the desert and one in West Virginia, feel distinct from one another. What effect does such a big move have on the family, and on your reading of the story? How would you describe the shift in the book's tone?
9. Were you surprised to learn that, as adults, Jeannette and her siblings remain close to their parents? Why or why not? Why do you think they stay close?
10. What character traits do you think Jeannette inherited from her parents? Offer supporting examples. How do those traits shape her life?
11. Despite everything, Jeannette refuses to condemn her parents. Were you able, as a reader, to remain equally nonjudgmental? Why or why not?
12. Which scenes in the book are the most memorable to you? Most shocking? Most inspiring? Funniest? Explain your answers.
13. Discuss the metaphor of the glass castle, and what it signifies to Jeannette and to her father. What does it signify that, just before leaving for New York, Jeannette tells her father she doesn't believe he'll ever build it? Explain.

All your answers should demonstrate a careful reading of the book, and a mastery of composition skills and Standard English usage.