

# Book Discussion Questions

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Spoiler Alert: Some questions give away parts of the story. We advise reading the book first.

1. In tracing four years of the ups and downs between Emma and Margaret, what does “Even Sunflowers Cast Shadows” say about the nature of friendship between children?
2. Douglas Armstrong has said that his book is an homage to one of his favorite books, “To Kill a Mockingbird.” What are some specific ways that “Even Sunflowers Cast Shadows” pays tribute to Harper Lee’s novel?
3. Over the course of “Even Sunflowers Cast Shadows,” Emma gains a greater understanding of her father. What do you think is the turning point in their relationship?
4. Shortly after meeting Margaret, Emma laments, “Were the Drummonds better than us at everything?” But as she gets to know the family better, she realizes that it doesn’t measure up so favorably. What are some other instances where Emma makes false assumptions because of her limited perspective?
5. Emma’s Grandma Thaney seems to have a saying for every situation imaginable. What are some of your favorites? Why do you think she relies so heavily on adages?
6. From the start, it’s clear that there’s a special bond between Emma and John B. What are some of the clues that Aunt Fern and Thad also share a special closeness as siblings?
7. Eileen, in effect, teaches Emma to read. But that is about the extent of her nurturing side. Compare the kind of big sister Emma gets in Eileen with the kind of big sister she is to Sue-Sue. Do you think we’d get a different picture if Sue-Sue were the narrator? And how do the relationships among the Drummond girls compare?
8. We see very few examples of kindness toward Emma. What are some of the ways that she seems to be treated harshly by the people around her? Based on stories you’ve heard from those who grew up then, do you think her experiences were typical for children of the 1920s? In what ways has childhood changed for the better? For the worse?
9. There are several deaths in the story, and in some cases they happen at home as more a part of daily life than would likely be the case now. In what ways could this first-hand experience be beneficial to Emma and her siblings? In what ways could it be harmful?
10. What does Emma learn about Margaret on what John B. calls their “Joplin escapade”? What does she learn about herself?
11. Emma picks up on behaviors in Max Nix that make her uneasy. Why do you think her parents and siblings are more trusting?
12. The book makes very clear that there were distinct dividing lines between blacks and whites in 1920s Kansas. How is this division manifested in Emma’s relationship with Roberta? Do you think Emma could have been a better friend to Roberta? Why or why not?
13. Given their differences, why do you think Rach and John B. become such good friends?
14. What factors in his life shape Rach and drive him to his fate?
15. Do you agree with John B. and Emma’s assessment of Eileen’s level of responsibility for Rach’s actions. Why or why not?