

Nowhere to Run

Discussion/Writing Guide

Some of these questions are for class Discussion and others will work well as Writing Questions. I wrote a lot of questions, so you can choose the ones that will work best for your students. Your feedback is welcome.

I plan to update the Discussion Guide periodically. If you send me a question or activity that I use in the guide, I will send you a signed copy of *Nowhere to Run*.

Comprehension Check:

These quick questions will tell you if students have read the book and understand key events in the story.

1. What does DeeJ say that keeps Norris from beating up Calvin?
2. Who does Calvin work for after school?
3. Who does DeeJ live with?
4. What animal does DeeJ compare Junior's father to? Why?
5. What do Calvin and Junior do every day after school?
6. How does DeeJ's life change after the suspension?
7. What happens to Calvin in the Coach store?
8. What illegal thing does DeeJ get Calvin to do?
9. Why doesn't Albert report Calvin to the police?
10. What happens when Calvin tries to get back together with Junior?
11. What does DeeJ tell Calvin to do in the final race of his career? Why?

Thematic Questions:

1. A big theme in *Nowhere to Run* is friendship. How would you describe Calvin and DeeJ's friendship? Is it an "equal" or "unequal" friendship? Does it change over time?
2. There are several scenes where Calvin and DeeJ talk about serious ideas. Why is it important to have that kind of relationship with somebody?
3. Describe Calvin's relationship with Albert. What does Calvin get from this relationship?

4. How important do you think Calvin is to Little Lewis? How does their relationship change throughout the book?
5. Describe the home situations of Calvin, Junior and Deej. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
6. What are the potential problems in a relationship like Calvin's and Junior's where they have different backgrounds and expectations about life?
7. How would you describe Norris? What makes him such a bad guy? What do you think of Deej's comment in Chapter 4 that he can "handle" Norris?
8. What do you think of the ending? Did Calvin win the race? Could/Should the book have ended differently?
9. What do you think the future holds for Calvin and Junior?
10. What do you think Calvin's relationship with Albert will be like in the future?
11. What are some difficult choices Calvin has to make in the book? Have you ever had to make a decision when the best option wasn't clear? How did you decide what to do? What were the consequences of that decision?
12. Do you know people like the characters in *Nowhere to Run*? Which character is most like you?

Issue Questions:

1. How important is parenting to a child's or teen's success? What are some obstacles to good parenting?
2. How important is education to a young person's success? How would you describe yourself as a student?
3. Calvin excels at running, and his success is recognized by others. How important is this to how he sees himself? How much value do you think this has in a young person's life? Do you have a talent?
4. At the beginning of the book, there is a quote which says: "Life is lived forward but understood backward." What do you think that means? Who talks to Calvin about this idea? Where does it happen in the book? Does Calvin find this thought helpful? Do you?

Note: The quote was written by the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. He is not an easy read, but his ideas are appealing to teens because he talks about issues like alienation, ethics, powerlessness, and commitment. If your students want to know more about him, there is a good entry on Wikipedia and some interesting quotes at Brainyquote.com. Good luck with this one!