

Questions for Discussion

The Blackberry Bush by David Housholder

Great to work through alone; best in a group, book club, or classroom setting.

Level One: Getting Started

1. Josh loved Adri, and Kati loved Harald—their grandparents. What is/was your relationship with your grandparents like? With which older person have you been the closest in life? Why were you attracted to that person?

2. If this story was a movie, and you were in charge of casting, whom would you choose to play the different characters?

3. Who do you believe the narrator was? Have you ever had an encounter with someone where an “angel option” is the best explanation? Share the story.

4. Josh has skills and abilities that set him apart from others. Has that ever been painful for you? Have you ever hidden a gift because it would make others uncomfortable? If so, tell what happened. Why do some people—especially teens—“dumb down” to become more popular? What does it cost them in the long run?

5. If you have a best friend, what is the biggest tension between the two of you? Kati struggled with jealousy with Zara. Joshua’s competition with Max turned ugly. How do you handle the tensions in your relationship?

6. See how many times you can find the imagery of the blackberry bush in the story. What does “the blackberry bush” mean to you?

7. Which character in the novel would you love to spend more time with? Why?

8. Nellie was tarred and feathered for fraternizing with the occupying German enemy army. Why do you think the punishments for treason were so severe?

If you were a citizen of an occupying country and it looked as though that invading country would win, how would you respond? Would you consider—for the good of your family perhaps—collaborating with the occupying military? Would you just keep your head down and hope no one notices you? Or would you resist against the invading army? Explain.

9. Josh had a favorite painting. Do you? If so, what is it, and why do you love it? How does it “speak” to you?

10. Kati struggled most of her life with the way she looks. What, do you think, leads to the fact that growing girls, especially, deal with so much body image pressure? If you are a girl/woman, how do you handle it?

11. Josh avoids organized sports while growing up. What are some of the good things and bad things about youth sports? Can they be overdone? What experience(s) have you or those you know had to back your thoughts?

12. Josh continued to doodle the ThornHeart and octagons for years on end. Are there patterns that you sketch over and over? If so, describe them. Why do they have a hold on you?

13. How much pressure have you felt from your parents to achieve their dreams for you? How much of it is real and how much is in your mind?

14. Josh and Kati's future life in 2031 is a little different than the world we live in. What do you think will be better in the next generation? What do you think will be worse? What one thing would you change about the way young people grow up, in order to make the world a better place?

15. If you were to write a sequel to this book, what characters would you include? What would the storyline be?