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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Yes, I Know the Monkey Man

by Dori Hillestad Butler

Thirteen-year-old T.J. always believed that her twin sister and her mother were dead—because that’s what her father had told her. But Mom and Sam are very much alive. And now they want T.J. to be part of their family.

When T.J. reluctantly visits her mom and Sam for the first time, she is stunned by how similar she is to her twin sister, even though their lives have been very different. But while she is drawn to her new family, she is also wary of becoming attached to them and hurting her father’s feelings. Then when her father suffers a debilitating accident and tries to ensnare T.J. in another web of lies, her loyalties are finally tested.

1. At the beginning of the book, T.J. doesn’t seem happy to have learned that she has a twin sister. Why?
2. T.J. is hesitant to trust many people with information about her situation throughout the book. In what cases do you think this was good or bad, and what effects did this have on T.J. in the long run?
3. T.J. seemed to be proud of her self-reliance and independence, though it didn’t always work out in the way she planned. What are key moments in the book where T.J. realizes she needed further help?
4. Why doesn’t Joe want T.J. to tell Gram the truth about his accident? Are there any benefits to not telling the truth? What are the drawbacks?
5. The judge said he would award Joe custody of T.J. “As long as we can be certain he really is a good father” (p. 63). How do you know if someone is a good father? What do you think qualities of a good father are? Do you think Joe is a good father?
6. T.J. often points out how she and Sam aren’t alike. How do you think T.J. and Sam are similar? How are they not alike?
7. Why did Sam and T.J. form a pact? How could trust and support between siblings be useful?
8. T.J. never had to deal with loss within her lifetime, however Suzanne and Sam did. How did spending time with them change her perspective on loss by the end of the book?
9. Bob’s family does not feel like family to Sam, even though her mother keeps “pushing all these people on me” (p. 118). In your opinion, what makes a family feel like family?
10. Why does T.J. say that she feels about Sam and Suzanne the way Sam feels about Bob’s family? Why do T.J. and Sam’s feelings towards their situation differ?
11. How did T.J.’s understanding of a parental figure change throughout the course of the book? Do you think T.J.’s final decision was the correct one?
12. How does T.J.’s attitude toward having a twin sister change by the end of the story?
13. Consider how the “Monkey Man” in the title is referencing T.J. and Sam’s father. After reading the story, analyze the title and how it relates to T.J.’s relationship with her father. Do you think she really knows her father? How and how not?



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