



Discussion Questions for *Beginners Welcome*

by Cindy Baldwin

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1. After her daddy's death, Annie Lee is determined to stay invisible because "invisible people couldn't be seen, and people who couldn't be seen couldn't be hurt" (page 7). Do you agree with her? Have you ever had a time where you found yourself choosing invisibility over the possibility of getting hurt?
2. Throughout the book, Annie Lee carries a two-headed quarter that used to belong to her father. What does Annie Lee believe the quarter will do for her? Do you think carrying the quarter has a real effect on Annie Lee's life? Do you think the quarter is a metaphor for something else in the story, especially when it is lost in Chapter 33?
3. Annie Lee and Mama struggle to relate to each other after Daddy's death. On page 54, Annie Lee says that "if we were an orchestra, Daddy had been the conductor. He'd been the glue that held me and Mama together." She even finds herself wishing that it had been Mama who died instead of Daddy. Why do you think that might be? Do you get along better with one parent or guardian than you do with another?
4. When Annie Lee first sees Ray Owens, on page 13, she notices colorful lights rising off the keyboard as he plays the piano, but quickly realizes that not everyone around them can see the lights the way Annie Lee and Ray can. What does Ray tell her in Chapter 29 about why he thinks some people can see the lights and others can't? Do you agree with his explanation? Can you think of anything else that might explain who sees the lights?
5. In different ways, Ray, Mitch, Queenie, and even Mama encourage Annie Lee to be the "bravest, wisest version" of herself. How does this encouragement change Annie Lee's decisions and behavior? Do you have people in your life who encourage you to be brave and wise?

6. Over the course of their piano lessons, Ray encourages Annie Lee to take off her invisibility cloak and let herself try new things and make new friends, even if it means she might make mistakes or get hurt. Do you agree with Ray that "learning to open [yourself] back up again" after you've been hurt is the way to find happiness (page 197), or do you think that Annie Lee is right when she says on page 7 that it's better to stay invisible so that you can't be hurt?
7. Several times throughout the book, Annie Lee dreams about her daddy in a place "where the sun and sky sparkled like glass, and dozens of colorful umbrellas...hung suspended in the sky so that it felt like we were wrapped up in a rainbow." What do you think these dreams mean for Annie Lee? How are the dreams similar to the ghost that haunts Annie Lee's apartment? How are they different?
8. Between the colorful lights over the piano when Ray plays, and the colorful umbrellas in Annie Lee's dreams about her daddy, bright colors play a big role in BEGINNERS WELCOME. Why do you think this might be? What do you think the colors of both the lights and the umbrellas might represent to Annie Lee over the course of the book?
9. Annie Lee and Mitch work together on an egg-drop project for their sixth-grade science class. How do you think the egg-drop project might serve as a symbol for other things in Annie Lee's life? How does Annie Lee use the egg-drop project in Chapter 44 to try to make up with Mitch after they fight?
10. Can you find any examples of figurative language (such as simile and metaphor) in BEGINNERS WELCOME? What role do you think figurative language plays in building up Annie Lee's voice and the general atmosphere of the story?
11. Music Extension activity: Listen to some of the songs mentioned in the book, like "Annie's Song" by John Denver, "Like A Sad Song" by John Denver, or "You Can Call Me Al" by Simon & Garfunkel. (You can find all the songs named in the book on the Beginners Welcome playlist here.
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1FlrNI83iYZRSNt85B4HyT?si=Xs1-nmAjQLicvTvuyBPI9g>) How do you think the mood of the songs compares to the mood of the scenes they're mentioned in? (For example, the scenes on pages 210, 176, and 220.) In general, how do you think music is used to create specific moods in BEGINNERS WELCOME?
12. Science Extension activity: Many of the designs that Annie Lee and Mitch come up with for their egg-drop project fail to protect their egg when dropped off Annie Lee's balcony, like the one described in Chapter 24. Why do you think that design fails? Why do you think the design Annie Lee and Mitch test at their sleepover in Chapter 30 succeeds?