



CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

SUMMARY OF TEXT

Mercer Buddie, a midwestern high school boy, wants two things: a girlfriend and to prove his skills as a beginning falconer. Hunting season is quickly approaching, and Mercer only has a limited amount of time to work with Flip, his newly captured adolescent falcon. But when Mercer meets Lucy he has a very distracting reason to fly away from his falconry goals. He soon discovers that Lucy's parents belong to a fanatical animal rights organization called HALT, and Mercer realizes that if he wants to keep seeing Lucy he needs to keep his falconry hobby and his dad's raptor rehabilitation center a secret from her, and Lucy's family's involvement with HALT from his own family. Mercer's tale is at times funny, at times heartbreaking, and always brutally honest as he navigates the complicated world of growing up and learning to make difficult decisions.

VOCABULARY

- Chapter 7: Mews: the secure enclosure where a hawk lives
- Chapter 7: Jesses: leather strips which go through the anklets to allow the falconer to hold the bird and attach the leash
- Chapter 14: Mute: the fecal matter of a falcon
- Chapter 30: Flushing stick: device used by the falconer to scare quarry from under cover so it can be hunted by the falcon
- Chapter 30: Quarry: the game being hunted, such as rabbit, pheasant, and quail

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out these online resources for more information on falcons and falconry right here in Illinois.

- <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/education/Pages/WildAboutBirdsRaptors.aspx>
- <http://www.illinoisfalconers.org/Capture%20Application%202014.pdf>
- <http://illinoisraptorcenter.org>
- <https://dnr2.illinois.gov/teachkids/DNRtitles.asp>



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CHAPTER 1

- On p. 4, Mercer says that the girl in the pet store “blessed me with a blue ribbon smile.” What does he mean by this metaphor?
- Why does Mercer say at the end of the chapter that he’s not sure “which one of us was the man and which one was the mouse”?

CHAPTER 2

- Why are the Buddies trying to catch the hawk?
- Whose respect does Mercer crave? Why do you think this is important to him?

CHAPTER 3

- What questions do you still have about falconry?
- Why do you think one of the license requirements is being advised by an experienced falconer?

CHAPTER 4

- How would you describe Mercer’s relationship with his brother Lincoln?
- How about his relationship with his father?

CHAPTER 5

- Why is the HALT group protesting?
- Predict some potential future conflict between Lucy and Mercer if they continue to get to know each other.



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CHAPTER 6

- What does Mercer mean by the rumor being “juiced up”?
- After reading this chapter, what are your initial thoughts on animal testing?

CHAPTER 7

- Why do you think it’s so important to clean the birds’ mews every day?
- Why is Mercer so impatient when working with Flip?

CHAPTER 8

- Is it a good idea for Mercer to mislead Lucy so much while on the phone? When, if ever, would it be appropriate to change yourself for someone else?
- What advice would you give to Mercer as he pursues a relationship with Lucy?

CHAPTER 9

- Describe Mercer’s relationship with his friend Charlie.
- Why does Mercer walk right by Lucy’s table without stopping?

CHAPTER 10

- Why are the girls opposed to eating meat?
- Are there any foods that you avoid eating? Why?



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CHAPTER 11

- On p. 101 Mercer says that Charlie's refusal to stop eating meat was "making me cringe at how much of a wimp I truly was." What does he mean by this?
- In what ways can Weasel's advice about timing with training a hawk be applied to Mercer's relationship attempts with Lucy?

CHAPTER 12

- On p. 119, Mercer notices some inconsistencies with the rally attendees. For instance, some are wearing leather belts. What are your thoughts on his observations?
- What do you think will happen when Mercer's parents find out what he was really doing at the mall?

CHAPTER 13

- Why does Mercer let his hawk fly free, even though he knows it's risky?
- In what ways is Mercer starting to change in how he thinks about relationships?

CHAPTER 14

- What are your thoughts on the relationships among the three Buddie children?
- Why does Lincoln over-feed Flip?

CHAPTER 15

- We don't get a good idea of how Lucy feels about the events at the fair. What do you think is going through her head at the moment?
- Does Mercer deserve the "consequences" his parents are suggesting? What do you think should happen?



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CHAPTER 16

- Explain Mercer’s dad’s point that falconry actually helps birds of prey to thrive. Do you agree with his argument?
- Is it fair that Mercer’s dad is requiring him to choose between HALT and falconry? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 17

- Mercer continues to lie in order to maintain the possibility of dating Lucy. Is this a good decision? What do you think about their conversation on the bus?
- It’s often hard (or impossible) to get everything we want in life. Mercer is still acting like he can “have it all.” Do you think this is actually possible for him? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 18

- Explain the friction between Reed and Mercer at the beginning of this chapter.
- Things are going well for Mercer and Lucy at the end of Chapter 18. Predict what you think will happen next.

CHAPTER 19

- Weasel asks Mercer if he’s “standing by [his] own principles.” What are your “principles” in life?
- Mercer still seems interested in shortcuts – both with his hawks and with girls. What is the danger in always wanting to find the quickest path to the “finish line”?

CHAPTER 20

- Is Lincoln a good role model for Mercer when it comes to his treatment of relationships with girls? Support your opinions with references to the text.
- Predict what you think will happen between Reed and Mercer.



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CHAPTER 21

- Is Reed in the wrong in this chapter? Is Mercer? Who is to blame for their disagreement?
- Why is Lucy upset with Mercer? Is she justified in feeling this way?

CHAPTER 22

- How is the relationship between Mercer and Maddie evolving?
- The Buddie siblings are keeping a lot of secrets for each other. When is it okay to keep a secret? When is it **not** okay?

CHAPTER 23

- Who do you think did this to the rehab center birds?
- It's possible that the person/people who released all the birds thought they were doing "the right thing." For what reasons were their actions actually "a bad thing"? Is it **ever** appropriate to destroy someone else's property?

CHAPTER 24

- How is Lucy's opinion of HALT changing?
- It seems that Lucy is starting to split with her parents as far as their HALT work is concerned. Are there things with your parents or other family members that you disagree with? Why?

CHAPTER 25

- In what ways are Mercer and Lucy's families similar?
- Mercer says on p. 265 that, for the first time, "I felt more like a man than a boy." What do you think he means by this?



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CHAPTER 26

- Mercer is still wrestling with his feelings for Lucy. In the previous chapter, he even compared their situation to Romeo and Juliet. Should Mercer still be interested in a relationship with Lucy? Why or why not?
- At the end of the chapter, Mercer remembers that he now has to face his father. What do you think his father will have to say about the vandalism? About Mercer's efforts to try to fix the problem?

CHAPTER 27

- Is Mercer's dad right? Should Mercer have called him right away?
- Why doesn't Mercer tell his dad who did this? Was this another mistake on his part?

CHAPTER 28

- Mercer's dad discusses some animal rights causes that he agrees with. What are some of your beliefs in terms of animal rights? What are people/groups in your community doing to help take care of animals?
- What punishment is justified for Lucy's parents?

CHAPTER 29

- Mercer finally calls it quits with Lucy. Do you agree or disagree with his decision?
- Mercer says in this chapter that, "it was the first time in a long while that our family felt complete." Why does it sometimes take traumatic experiences to bring people together?

CHAPTER 30

- We finally get to see Mercer and Flip hunt together. What questions do you still have about falconry?
- Have you ever hunted before? Does the idea of hunting interest you? Why or why not?



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CHAPTER 31

- What are your reactions to the traditions of the annual falconry competition?
- How has Mercer changed as a character over the course of the book?

FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did this book change your opinion on hunting?
- For most people, the meat they eat comes from a farm, and not from hunting. What connections might there be between how Mercer's family cares for their birds and how farmers take care of their animals?
- Animals provide us with food, fiber, and by-products that are used in thousands of products every day around the world. In what ways is animal agriculture a part of your daily life?
- If you could talk to a farmer who raises animals, what questions would you ask?
- Humans used to all be hunter-gatherers. Eventually, they invented agriculture and society changed forever. Today, fewer and fewer people hunt for their food, and fewer and fewer people are directly involved in production agriculture as farmers. Many people have little to no idea how their food is grown and raised on farms around the world. What are possible downsides to being so disconnected to how our food is grown? What would you like to better understand about where your food comes from?
- In many ways, this book is about following your passion. Though they were misguided, the HALT members were passionate about their cause just like Mercer and his family were passionate about falconry. What "causes" are you passionate about? In what ways do you share your passion(s) through words and actions?
- This book also shows readers the value in sitting down and talking about our opinions, especially with those who might think differently than we do. Often, we aren't as different as we think we are. And other times, we find that we don't understand the issue as well as we thought we did. What is something that you feel strongly about, but maybe don't have all the facts about? What can you do to better understand this important issue? Who could you talk to who might think a little differently than you do?