



CHAPTER DISCUSSION GUIDE

SUMMARY OF TEXT

The Thing About Luck is the story of Summer, a twelve-year-old Japanese-American girl, who after a difficult season of hard work comes to a greater understanding and appreciation of herself, her family, her relationships, and where she finds luck and happiness in life. The story, told through the eyes of Summer, centers around her grandparents (Obaachan and Jichaan) needing to work as custom wheat harvesters after her parents are called back to Japan to care for elderly family members. The family, including her younger brother Jaz, loads into a truck and begins their grueling summer of working in wheat fields across the Midwest to harvest the wheat at its prime. The story is a mesmerizing coming-of-age tale sprinkled with loads of accurate ag references and storylines. A must-read for students trying to find new meaning in their complex and hectic lives.

VOCABULARY

- Chapter 1: Inseparable
- Chapter 2: Acknowledge
- Chapter 3: De-stressing
- Chapter 4: Gaped/gaping
- Chapter 5: Bushel
- Chapter 6: Aura
- Chapter 7: Profound
- Chapter 7: Tyrant
- Chapter 7: Rogue
- Chapter 9: Efficiently
- Chapter 11: Sagely
- Chapter 15: Apathy

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Learn more about how wheat is grown in the U.S. at www.uswheat.org and www.wheatworld.org.
- Learn more about Illinois wheat production at www.illinoiswheat.org
- Watch a video about how wheat is milled into flour at <https://youtu.be/n5ifBXqQTzU>
- Read the IL Ag in the Classroom Wheat Ag Mag at www.agintheclassroom.org. <https://dnr2.illinois.gov/teachkids/DNRtitles.asp>



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CHAPTER 1

- Summer says on p. 6 that Jaz didn't have to use his manners "because he had issues." What do you think she might mean by this?
- What do you think about the relationship between Summer and Obaachan and Jiichan?
- Why do you think Summer has developed such an "inseparable" relationship with mosquitos?

CHAPTER 2

- Summer explains the custom harvesting business that her family works for. What questions do you still have about what Summer's family does for these farmers?
- When Summer realizes no one is coming to play with Jaz, she gets angry with the boys in his class. She is then reminder of a boy in her class who also didn't seem to have friends, and she vows to try to be his friend. This is an example of "empathy," which means the ability to share and understand the feelings of another person. Why is empathy an important human ability? What are some things that you have empathy for?

CHAPTER 3

- Why does Summer's attempt at friendship with Jenson not go well?
- What is the message/moral of the story Jiichan shares with Summer and Jaz before bed. Why do you think he tells them this story?
- Summer is getting ready to go on the road with her family for many months. She even has to get all her schoolwork from her teachers. How is this different than your life?

CHAPTER 4

- Why do Obaachan and Jiichan keep fighting over who will die first? Is this meant to be funny, or not?
- Summer explains how a combine works in detail in this chapter. Why is a combine such an important machine?
- Summer does an excellent job of describing Mrs. Parker in a memorable way. Re-read her description on p. 43 and then choose someone you know to write a description about in a similar way.



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CHAPTER 5

- As the Parkers and their crew get ready to start the harvest, we are starting to see how complex the process really is. What do you think would be the hardest part of running a custom harvest business like this? Who has the toughest job? Is one job more important than the others?
- When we go to the grocery store and see aisles full of food choices, it is sometimes easy to forget all the people and processes that work to get that food there. In this chapter, Summer talks about the tricky process of harvesting wheat at the correct time. What have you learned about harvesting and growing wheat so far? How do you eat wheat in your diet?

CHAPTER 6

- Summer and Obaachan seem to have a difficult relationship. But then Summer shares the story of her grandmother lying with her in the hospital bed when she was sick with malaria. What do you think about their relationship? Does it remind you of any of your family relationships? How do you think Obaachan really feels about Summer?
- Summer keeps thinking about the book *A Separate Peace* long after she has stopped reading it. Why do you think it had such an impact on her? How has she connected it with her own life? Have you ever read a book that had a similar impact on you?

CHAPTER 7

- Why are Robbie's chores with the combines important for the crew? He mentioned the "zerks." Do you know what a "zerk" is? If not, research the word to learn more. What might happen if Robbie doesn't take his work seriously?
- Why do you think Mrs. Parker is so particular about her recipes? Do you think Obaachan is changing the recipes on purpose?

CHAPTER 8

- This chapter has a lot of details related to food. Obaachan and Mrs. Parker agree about the importance of eating meat for young boys, and Summer and Robbie discuss Japanese cooking. What foods are most important for you to eat to stay healthy? What are some examples of foods or meals that are important in your family traditions? What foods do you eat that come from cultures different than yours?
- When Thunder kills the chickens, Robbie tells Summer not to tell anyone. Why does he think this is the right decision? What do *you* think the right decision is in this situation? What should Summer do?



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CHAPTER 9

- This chapter focuses a lot on Summer and her thoughts and feelings inside her head. Near the end of the chapter, she talks about people needing to “untangle all the things inside of [them].” What do you think she means by this? Are kids “untangled”? Are adults?
- At the very end of the chapter, Summer and Jaz share a laugh with her comment about “putting love into the potatoes.” What does this expression mean? Is it possible to “put love into” something?

CHAPTER 10

- When Summer first meets Mr. Laskey’s daughter she says, “A part of me wanted to be friends with her, and a part of me wanted to bop her on the head.” What does she mean by this? Have you ever felt this way about someone? Why?
- At the end of the chapter, Obaachan tells Summer that what she did was stupid, but it was the right thing to do. Do you agree with her?
- Summer just lost \$100 of her hard-earned money, but the chapter ends with her thinking that “maybe I’d have even better luck tomorrow.” Why is she feeling “lucky” tonight?

CHAPTER 11

- What are your reactions to the conversation between Summer and Jaz when she returns from Robbie’s? Does Summer give Jaz good advice? What would you tell Jaz to make him feel better in that moment?
- What is the moral of the story that Jiichan tells Summer and Jaz before they fall asleep? What does “when you walk, think of walk” actually mean?

CHAPTER 12

- After the events of this chapter, what are your opinions about Robbie? Did Summer handle that situation well?
- Summer says at the end of the chapter that she “felt humiliated and proud at the same time.” Mrs. Parker agrees that “it’s the human condition.” How can you be both humiliated and proud at the same time? Have you ever felt this way? Is it truly just part of being human?



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CHAPTER 13

- Why does the farmer have a gun with him when he meets the custom harvesters?
- Jiichan is really starting to struggle. Predict what you think will happen with Jiichan's health and wellness as they continue the harvest. Does he have any options besides continuing to work?

CHAPTER 14

- Mr. Parker is struggling between taking care of his employees and taking care of his customers' crops. Summer describes his inner voice as saying, "Take care of the people, take care of the crops." Farmers struggle with this constantly. They must take care of themselves while also taking care of their crops and animals. Sometimes it is hard to do both well. Have you ever had a situation when you had to choose what to take care of, knowing that something else or someone else would *not* be taken care of because of your choice?
- Were you surprised that Summer decided to try to drive the combine herself? Why does she decide to do this? Do you think she will get in trouble for her actions?

CHAPTER 15

- Jiichan once said, "You find magic everywhere, in wheat field, in mosquito, even here." Do you agree? Where do you find "magic" in your daily life?
- Reflect on the state of Summer's family right now. How is each member of family doing at this point in the story.

CHAPTER 16

- Summer finds out in this final chapter that Obaachan had been crying earlier in the day about the fact that Summer was growing up quickly. Do you think Obaachan knows what Summer has been doing at night? And why doesn't Obaachan express her emotions to Summer?
- Is the ending of this book happy or sad? Or both? Why do you think Summer believes her family's run of bad luck has changed? How is the ending of the book related to the idea of "wabi-sabi" introduced in this chapter?



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FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Did this book change your understanding or appreciation for how our food is grown and harvested? Why or why not?
- A “dynamic character” is a character who changes in meaningful ways in a story. How is Summer a “dynamic character” in this story? Would you consider any other characters as “dynamic” as well?
- Choose an important scene or chapter in the book. How would this part of the book have been different if it had been told from the point of view of a different character?
- Even though he is a minor character, Mick becomes an important character in the story near the end of the book. How is he important to this story and Summer’s development as a character?
- If you could ask a farmer or harvesting crew questions about their work, what would you ask them?
- This book recognizes a number of jobs in the agriculture industry, such as the farmer, custom harvester, truck driver, elevator operator, diesel mechanic, and more. What other jobs can you think of that would be connected to the farming showcased in *The Thing About Luck*?
- This book centers around the relationships between Summer and her family. What are your final reactions to each of her family members and her relationship with them? Do any of them remind you of people in your family?