

GRADES  
5 & UP

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

# SEEING RED

Meets  
Common Core  
State Standards  
— See inside —

KATHRYN ERSKINE  
Author of National Book Award Winner *Mockingbird*



SCHOLASTIC

# About the Book

Discover the past

Understand the present

Change the future

Life will never be the same for Red Porter. He's a kid growing up around black car grease, white fence paint, and the backward attitudes of the folks who live in his hometown, Stony Gap, Virginia, in 1972.

Red's daddy, his idol, has just died, leaving Red and Mama with some hard decisions and a whole lot of doubt. Should they sell the Porter family business, a gas station, repair shop, and convenience store rolled into one, where the slogan—"Porter's: We Fix it Right!"—has been shouting the family's pride for as long as anyone can remember?

With Daddy gone, everything's different. Through his friendship with Thomas, Beau, and Miss Georgia, Red starts to see there's a lot more than car motors and rusty fenders that need fixing in his world.

When Red discovers the injustices that have been happening in Stony Gap since before he was born, he's faced with unsettling questions about his family's legacy.

Award-winning author Kathryn Erskine weaves a work of historical fiction filled with insight, humor, and moral inquiry.



## COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

This guide addresses the following Common Core State Standards in Reading Literature:

<i>Key Ideas and Details</i>	<i>Craft and Structure</i>	<i>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</i>	<i>Range of Reading Level of Text Complexity</i>
Grade 5 – RL.5.1-3	Grade 5 – RL.5.4-6	Grade 5 – RL.5.9	Grade 5 – RL.5.10
Grade 6 – RL.6.1-3	Grade 6 – RL.6.4-6	Grade 6 – RL.6.9	Grade 6 – RL.6.10
Grade 7 – RL.7.1-3	Grade 7 – RL.7.6		Grade 7 – RL.7.10
Grade 8 – RL.8.1-3	Grade 8 – RL.8.5-6		Grade 8 – RL.8.10
Grade 9 – RL.9.1-3	Grade 9 – RL.9.5		Grade 9 – RL.9.10

# Discussion Questions

1. At the beginning of *Seeing Red*, Red thought, “How hard could it be to jump-start a heart?...Daddy fixed everything.” There is a theme of “fixing things” throughout the book. Choose one of the following things that needed “fixing” and explain why it needs fixing: Red’s family, the Dunlop family, Beau’s future, Miss Georgia’s land, Reverend Benson, or the prejudice in the town against minorities and woman.
2. Red and Thomas were unlikely friends in Stony Gap, Virginia. Why was their friendship considered unlikely? How and why did their friendship change? Have you ever had a friend who was different from you? What were the differences? Is it good to have friends who are different? Why or why not?
3. “You’re not one to run away from things.” “How much choice have we got?” “The Truth will set you free.” All of these statements are words of advice given to Red throughout the story. How do they all relate to Red? Did he use any of the advice? Which piece of advice do you think is the most important? Why?
4. The members of the Brotherhood forced Red to light a cross on fire and to kick Thomas. Why do you think they made Red do this? Why didn’t Red do more to help Thomas? Think of a time when you participated in something that you did not want to do. Why did you do it? How did it make you feel?
5. Who was Emmett Till? Why do you think Miss Georgia kept a scrapbook about him? Why did Mrs. Pugh get upset when Mr. Reynolds told Miss Miller’s class about Emmett Till? Why do you think the author included this real event in the book?
6. Red and his mother had different ways of dealing with the death of his father. Explain how they both grieved over the loss. Have you ever grieved over the loss of a family member, friend or pet? How did you grieve? Do you think there is a wrong way for someone to grieve? If so, how?
7. The 1970s was not only a time of African Americans seeking equal rights; women were demanding equal status as well. Cite at least two examples of Mrs. Porter standing up for equality. Do you think that Mrs. Porter was justified in her actions? Name two groups of people who are currently discriminated against in America. Why do you think discrimination is still common today?
8. Explain the blood oath between Old Man Porter and Daniel Dunlop. Have you ever heard of a blood oath? Do you think it should be considered legal?
9. Red realizes that “if you ignore warnings, they jump from being warnings to something that’s already happened, and then it is too late.” What do you think Red meant by this? Have you ever ignored a warning or bad feeling? What happened? If you could go back and change your actions, would you? Do you think the outcome would be different?
10. In what ways did Philip Walter help Red? Have you ever had someone unexpectedly help you or make you feel better about something? If so, who was it? How did he or she help you?
11. Miss Georgia once stated that she “could see all the way to Freedom.” It was a saying that she grew up with yet she didn’t realize that she could actually see Freedom Church from her porch. What type of literary device did the author employ here? Look back through the book and give another example of this literary device.
12. The words “Fieri Facias” were written on the map. What does this phrase mean? Why was its meaning important for Red to figure out?
13. Reverend Benson believed that the black families in Stony Gap are “happier with their own kind.” What do you think he meant by this? Do you think he was right? Why do you think he tried to get his parishioners to agree with him? As a powerful man in the community, do you think this was right for him to do? Why or why not?
14. After he learned that Miss Miller was fired, Red told her: “You don’t tell us what to think! You tell us TO think!” Explain the difference. What other qualities did Miss Miller possess that made her a good teacher? Have you ever had a teacher like Miss Miller? If so, what was the most important thing he or she taught you?
15. Before Red found out the truth about Old Man Porter, he refused to give up his desk. Why was the desk so important to Red? How was it part of his legacy? How did the desk end up changing Red’s future?

16. More than once, Red claimed that he did not like history. However, he seemed to enjoy learning about his family's past, listening to Miss Georgia's stories, and working on the Firefox project. How did Red come to realize that history is important? What do you think is the most important thing Red learned about history? Why?
17. What was the title of Red's Firefox paper? How did the title relate to his project? Do you think that the title was fitting? Why or why not? Suggest an alternate title for Red's Firefox project paper and explain your reasons for choosing it.
18. Explain how Ray Dunlop was cruel to the following characters: Rosie, Darrell, Beau, Mr. Porter, and Red. Why do you think he was so mean to everyone? At any point in the book did you feel bad for him? Why or why not?
19. Mrs. Porter said, "Change can still be hard for people. It's confusing and sometimes even painful...like growing pains." What do you think she meant by this statement? Do you agree? Explain why or why not.
20. Miss Miller responded to Red's Firefox project paper with the words "honor," "truth," and "respect." Which of these three qualities do you think is most important for a person to possess? Why?
21. Why do you think Red left the piece of the altar from Freedom Church at his father's grave? Do you think that Miss Georgia would have agreed with this sentiment? Why or why not?
22. What did Beau mean when he said, "It's just like the sign said. You sure did fix it right, Red!?" In what other ways did Beau prove to be smarter than most people thought? In your opinion, what was the most important way that Beau helped Red and the whole Porter family?
23. Even though they weren't related, the Porters considered Miss Georgia and Beau kin. In what ways were they like kin? Do you have any people in your life who are not related to you by blood, but you consider kin? What do you think makes people kin?
24. What do you think Rosie was thinking when she burned down her dad's shed? Do you think that her feelings and actions were justified? Why or why not?
25. At Miss Georgia's funeral Red let Thomas leave without answering his question. What was the question? Do you think there is ever a time when some questions are better left unanswered? If so, when?
26. Give two reasons why each of the following characters deserved respect from the people in their community: Miss Miller, Mrs. Porter, Philip Walter, Miss Georgia, Mr. Reynolds, Thomas, Beau, George Freeman, and Red.
27. Red experienced a lot of changes throughout the story. List three of these changes. Which changes or losses do you think helped him grow the most? Why?
28. Do you think it's possible for Red and Thomas to be friends again? Why or why not? Think about a time when you let a friend down. How did it make you feel? Did you ever make up?
29. Do you think Red redeemed the Porter name? Why or why not?
30. In the Author's Note, Kathryn Erskine writes about a time in her life when she experienced injustice in South Africa. She wrote Seeing Red to help young readers understand "that it wasn't very long ago that people routinely judged one another by the color of their skin or by their ethnicity." She wants her readers to be like Red and make a difference in today's world. Do you think that she achieved her goal? Why or why not? Have you ever witnessed an injustice? What was it? What did you do, or what could you have done to change it?
31. Discuss the role of Rosie in the story; for example, how she changes from a girl into a young woman, how Red's feelings towards her change, and how the attitudes of the Porter family and the community toward confronting child abuse change. To what extent do Rosie's character and situation reinforce the theme of change throughout the novel?
32. Explore in more detail the changes in civil rights, women's rights, and the Vietnam War that are mentioned in the book. Discuss the significance of other political events of the time such as the Watergate scandal.

# Comparisons

You can have interesting discussions comparing the themes in the following books to those in *Seeing Red*.

## ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963***

by **Christopher Paul Curtis**

(Random House, 1995)

A poignant (and hilarious) story about an African American family's road trip to Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement.

## ***The Absolute Value of Mike***

by **Kathryn Erskine**

(Penguin, 2011)

A boy with a math learning disability is forced to spend the summer with distant relatives working on an engineering project and ends up learning much more than he bargained for.

## ***Mockingbird***

by **Kathryn Erskine**

(Penguin, 2010)

A girl with Asperger's grappling with loss of her brother and distraught father tries to make sense of the world around her and finds closure.

## ***Fire in the Streets***

by **Kekla Magoon**

(Simon & Schuster, 2013)

It's the summer of 1968, and fourteen-year-old Maxie is well on her way to joining the Black Panthers—until a secret threatens to turn her whole world upside down.

## ***Kensuke's Kingdom***

by **Michael Morpurgo**

(Scholastic, 2003)

After Michael's father loses his job, he buys a boat to take his family around the world. It's the perfect adventure—until Michael is swept overboard and is stranded on a desert island with a man from a much different background.

## ***The Glory Field***

by **Walter Dean Myers**

(Scholastic, 1994)

An African American saga of the Lewis family's battle for freedom and equality that spans over 250 years.

## ***Glory Be***

by **Augusta Scattergood**

(Scholastic, 2012)

A Mississippi town in 1964 gets riled when tempers flare at a segregated public pool.

## ***Leon's Story***

by **Leon Walter Tillage**

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

The son of a North Carolina sharecropper reminisces about growing up in the South during segregation and about his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

## ***Belle Prater's Boy***

by **Ruth White**

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996)

As twelve-year-old Gypsy tries to solve the mystery of her aunt's sudden disappearance, she learns an important lesson about the power and strength of family.

## ***Countdown***

by **Deborah Wiles**

(Scholastic, 2010)

Eleven-year-old Franny struggles to make sense of the turbulent and frightening world around her, as well as navigating her complicated family life.

# About the Author

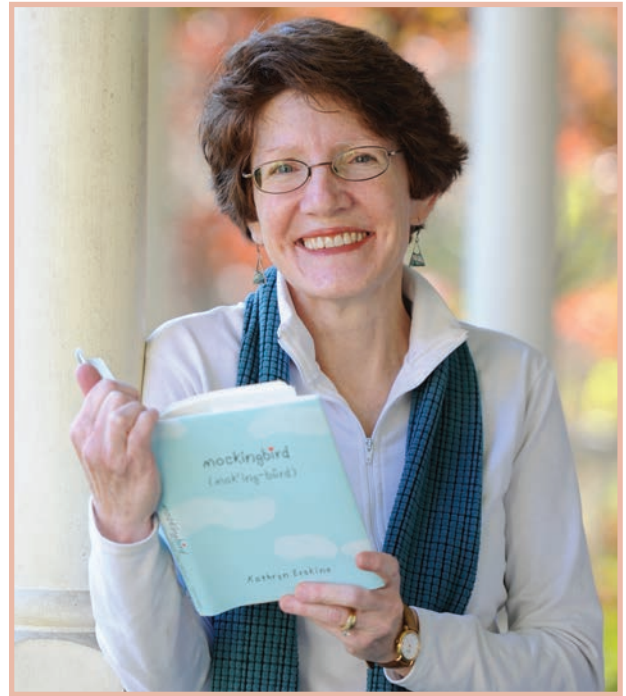
**Kathryn Erskine** is the acclaimed author of many distinguished novels for young readers, including *Mockingbird*, winner of the National Book Award; *The Absolute Value of Mike*, an Amazon Best Book and ALA Notable Children's Book; and *Quaking*, an ALA Top Ten Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia, with her family. You can visit her on the web at: [www.kathrynerskine.com](http://www.kathrynerskine.com)

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## *Seeing Red*

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