

Readers Group Guide

Carry On, by Lisa Fenn

Discussion Questions

1. Beyond the often-cited experience of teamwork, what's valuable about sports for children and young adults? What might have been particularly valuable for Dartanyon and Leroy given their experience of poverty and neglect?
2. What do Dartanyon and Leroy have in common? In what ways are they different? What struck you about their relationship?
3. How does the sport of wrestling seem to fit the struggles and abilities Dartanyon and Leroy face and possess?
4. The Lincoln-West High School wrestlers "weren't much of a team, but they were a family." What's the difference?
5. Just after Leroy's accident, paramedic Keith Forfia tells him "as long as your heart and mind are okay, you will be fine. Your heart and mind can take you everywhere you want to go." What might he mean? Even if true, what do the heart and mind need after such a trauma?
6. Dartanyon and Leroy struggle to explain how they became such good friends and why Dartanyon began carrying Leroy around. Why did they interact as naturally as they did? What is it about each of them that helps explain the relationship?
7. What's the role and value of humor in the friendship between Dartanyon and Leroy? How is it possible to access humor despite such extensive hardship?
8. Dartanyon, Leroy, and their extended families lack the words to describe and express their emotional pain, and the seeming helplessness of their lives. Why is language, especially the "language of suffering," so important to emotional health?
9. Citing Maya Angelou's idea that there is "great agony...bearing an untold story inside of you," Lisa wishes to get Dartanyon and Leroy to tell theirs. What makes this difficult for her? What are the key moments of progress in the process? What is the value of telling one's story?
10. At some point while spending time with Leroy, Lisa begins to care less about the story and more about "caring about the broken boy." What in her life helps explain this shift?
11. Against the traditional journalistic code of staying emotionally distant and objective, Lisa decides to enter the friendship between Dartanyon and Leroy, to become a part of their lives. Why is this a journalistic risk? Why is it worth it to her?

12. What effect did Lisa's initial lack of knowledge about the extent of poverty and neglect Dartanyon and Leroy suffered have on her efforts to befriend them and tell their story? How did she respond to and move beyond this? What are the limits of such understanding?
13. Lisa suggests that Dartanyon and Leroy might just show that "giving lightens us." What does she mean by this? How might it do so?
14. Beyond their heroic strength and perseverance, what are the many practical skills Dartanyon and Leroy needed to learn to become successful? How did they learn these skills?
15. Why is Dartanyon particularly successful at judo? What about the traditional meaning of the sport seems appropriate to his life?
16. Leroy eventually shifts his focus and energies from sports to studying drawing and graphic design. Why does this appeal to him?
17. After supporting Dartanyon and Leroy, adopting a child, and eventually giving birth to one, Lisa suggests that "parenthood doesn't demand perfection. It demands grace." What does she mean? What are other essential qualities for good parenting?
18. Trust is essential in relationships, especially for Dartanyon and Leroy. Why? How is it created? What are key moments in Lisa's earning of trust from Dartanyon and Leroy?
19. How did Lisa's relationship with Dartanyon and Leroy evolve over the years?
20. How do you regard Coach Robinson and his prayer walks around the Lincoln-West gym, where he asked God to help Dartanyon and Leroy? How would Lisa answer that question? Dartanyon? Leroy?
21. What does the strong, happy, non-traditional family built by Lisa and Navid suggest about what family means? What qualities are essential? What should be the goals of such a profound act of creation?
22. How important were the financial donations for Dartanyon and Leroy to overcome poverty? What else was necessary for them to succeed? In what ways has Carry On challenged or affirmed your knowledge of or experience with poverty?
23. What local programs or organizations in your community work to alleviate poverty and suffering? What do such organizations need in order to achieve their mission?