

# Reading Group Guide

## Kid Quixotes by Stephen Haff



1. Considering the excerpt from Robert Louis Stevenson's Letters, what is kindness? What are the effects of genuine acts of kindness? What are a few of your favorite examples of simple kindness in the book and in your life? What forces seem to make it difficult for people to be kind?
2. Consider the many children who have been a part of Still Waters in a Storm. What does each of those named here bring to the group? Which children demonstrate particular growth and transformation?
3. What are the fundamental values of Still Waters in a Storm? Why are these simple beliefs so important and powerful? What sole and profound rule results from these values?
4. What does it mean to listen well? What is the result for all involved from genuinely listening to one another? Why do so many people seem to fail to listen well, especially to children?
5. What is the "pedagogy of attention"? In what various ways is it made manifest at Still Waters in a Storm?
6. What motivated Stephen Haff to begin Still Waters in a Storm? In what ways has the work and experience helped and served him?
7. What values and beliefs drive the public schools these children attend during the day? In how many ways is Still Waters in a Storm different from public schooling in Bushwick and many underserved neighborhoods?
8. In what ways is "slowing down...a rebellion"?
9. What is important and transformative about the rich, complex, and layered experience with language—English, Spanish, Latin—in the work of Still Waters? What is particularly valuable about the collaborative task of translation?
10. What various qualities and experiences make Sarah such a powerful, appropriate Kid Quixote? What might it mean that "kindness is her thunderbolt"?
11. What do the drawings in the margins of Sarah's copy of Don Quixote reveal about her emotional and philosophical experience and sensitivities? What are the lessons in such narrative drawings?
12. How are drawing, writing, and singing similar or different forms of powerful expression? What is the particular strength of each?
13. In what various ways are stories powerful? What are the particular strengths of fiction and nonfiction? What are the many sources of the narratives about ourselves and the world that we might carry within us? What is the "potential oppression of stories"? How might people make sure their internal narratives are accurate and healthy?
14. Despite the "vicious, anti-immigrant rhetoric" the children hear all around them, Lily reminds the group that kids "love to laugh" and "always find what's funny at the most depressing time." What is healing about humor and laughter? Why do children have more immediate access to its power? When might laughter be inappropriate?
15. What might be valuable, even during dangerous, difficult times, about possessing a "loyalty to adventure"?

16. What was important and effective about the Real People Theater? What does it mean to “[seize] restricted knowledge”? What did Haff learn from the experience?
17. In what ways is the creating and singing of songs particularly valuable to the students? What does Kim reveal to the students about the connection between music and lyrics?
18. What might Haff mean when referring to “emotions carried by language”?
19. Consider the extensive and powerful soliloquy written by Lucy and Charlotte. What are its most powerful insights? What are the “crooked roads” and why are they valuable?
20. The students experience firsthand that “the interpretive choices they make as readers are as creative as the choices made by writers.” What might this mean? What is the most fruitful interaction between a reader and a text?
21. What is humility? What does humility require? In what ways is it important and powerful for the group? What might explain why, in the early days of the workshop, “the chief obstacle to this practice...was a desire for the individual power of control over others”?
22. One of the important goals of *Still Waters in a Storm* is to help the children be safe, but also brave, in their relationships, in the neighborhood of Bushwick, and in the world at large. What is bravery? How is bravery best enacted so that it doesn’t jeopardize safety?
23. Haff says that his “job in rehearsal is to banish fear”? What does he mean? How does practicing a creative act potentially achieve this? How might it translate to the outside world?
24. How does Haff define “disillusionment”? How did it rescue him?
25. In what ways are imagination and sympathy bridges?
26. In what ways was Haff’s mother’s “patch of sweet peas” a masterpiece? What do the children miss if they are denied experience of the natural world?
27. What are the various powerful effects of the children exchanging letters with the Guatemalan girls being kept in a detention center?
28. What is art’s relationship with reality? What is the value of creative forms of expression? When should one defer to “pure, live truth”?
29. What is profoundly important about Alex’s journey and her performing “Ruler of Myself”?
30. Consider the profound personal story told by Maggie to her daughters Sarah and Cleo. What are particularly poignant moments in her experience? What does she desperately want her daughters to understand?
31. In what ways are all of the experiences within *Still Waters in a Storm*—the children developing a sense of self and value amid isolation and chaos, Stephen being “pulled...up from the abyss, day after day,” everyone cultivating a genuine ability to listen and trust—a “search for truth”?

