

The Summer of the Swans

 [scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/summer-swans-discussion-guide](https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/summer-swans-discussion-guide)

Questions to Talk About

Set 1

Comprehension and Recall

1. Sara compares her feelings about the summer to a seesaw ride. What does she mean? (She feels up and down; one minute she's happy and the next she's not.)
2. Why is Sara upset when Wanda talks to her classmate about Charlie? (She thinks he's their problem; that his problems are a private matter.)

Higher-Level Thinking

3. Wanda tells Sara that most people are so worried about what's wrong with themselves that they don't notice what's wrong with others. What does this advice suggest about Wanda? (Possible answer: She's practical, observant, mature, wants to console Sara.)
4. How does Sara treat Charlie? (She's kindly, protective, helpful, mostly patient.)
5. Why does Aunt Willie take Frank's offer to ride on the motor scooter? (She's never been on one before; Sara has said she's too old, and she wants to prove that she's not.)
6. How does Sara feel about going into Mary's house when she and Charlie are on their way to the swans? (She's conflicted. She wants to go in, but has promised Aunt Willie to take Charlie to see the swans.)
7. Why is this summer so difficult for Sara? (She's growing up; things are changing.)
8. Why doesn't Charlie want to leave the pond? (He's fascinated by the swans and has trouble making changes.)
9. How do you think Charlie feels about Sara? (He trusts her and relies on her.)

Literary Elements

10. Character: How does the author show you that something is wrong with Charlie? (For a 10-year-old, Charlie acts strangely about the lollipop and the tent.)

Personal Response

11. Sara says it matters how you look, and Aunt Willie says it doesn't. What is your opinion?

Set 2

Comprehension and Recall

1. How did Charlie become brain damaged? (He had a high fever as a little boy.)

2. What does Charlie mistake for the swans? (the neighbors white cat)
3. How does Charlie get lost? (The barking dogs scare him, he gets confused and runs blindly.)
4. How does Sara misjudge Joe Melby? (She acts rude because she thinks he took Charlie's watch.)

Higher Level Thinking Skills

5. Why does Sara say she hates boys? (Possible answer: She thinks she's tall and unattractive and they won't notice or like her.)
6. How do you know that Sara is protective of Charlie? (She doesn't like it if Frank doesn't notice him or if other people talk about him; she turned the hose on Gretchen.)
7. Why is Charlie more comfortable at night than during the day? (The night is quiet, whereas the day is full of disturbing noises. Charlie lives in his own world, not the daytime world of most people.)
8. Why is Sara so sure that something has happened to Charlie? (She knows him well and is sensitive to his habits and needs.)
9. Why is Aunt Willie so hard on herself when Charlie disappears? (She's very worried and blames herself; she takes the responsibility of the Godfrey children very seriously.)
10. How has Mr. Godfrey coped with his family's problems? (He walked out on them.)
11. Do you think Sara wants her father to come home when Aunt Willie calls him? (Possible answer: Yes, because she keeps saying he won't come.)
12. Why does Aunt Willie defend Sara's father? (He's her brother. He had to take care of their family when they were growing up. Maybe she understands that he has reached his limit on dealing with tragedy.)
13. Why does Sara start to cry when Joe offers to help find Charlie? (She's upset—Charlie is gone, she's misjudged Joe and now he is being kind. She is overcome by his offer to help.)

Literary Elements

14. Character: What qualities does the character Joe Melby show? (Possible answer: kindness, helpfulness, decency, concern, persistence, humor)

Personal Response

15. Would you like to have Wanda as an older sister?. Why or why not?
16. Have you ever been lost? What happened? How did you feel?
17. Who, if anyone, is to blame for Charlie's disappearance? Why do you think so?

Set 3

Comprehension and Recall

1. How might Charlie's response to being lost differ from other people's? (He doesn't understand what has happened and has fewer ways to help himself.)
2. How does Sara feel when she hears Charlie's voice? (She's joyous and wild.)

3. How does Joe help Sara when Charlie wants her to fix his watch? (He lends Charlie his watch.)

Higher Level Thinking Skills

4. What do you learn about Mary that might have contributed to Sara's discontent over the summer? (She's going to a party given by Bennie; Sara hasn't been invited. Mary keeps referring to the party while they are searching for Charlie.)

5. How does Joe make it easy for Sara to apologize to him? (He tells her about the guru who didn't speak for 28 years.)

6. What do Joe and Sara have in common? (Possible answers: They act too hastily; they care about Charlie.)

7. Why does Sara suddenly feel so happy? (She has found Charlie and made a new friend in Joe.)

8. What comparison does Sara make between herself and her father? (She sees him as sitting at the bottom of steps, having given up, while she sees herself as having just taken an enormous step forward out of the shadows.)

Literary Elements

9. Theme: What theme does the author write about? (Possible answer: facing problems; growing with them)

Personal Response

10. Have you ever been left out of a party or other social event? How did you feel?

11. For Charlie, surprises are dangerous. How do you feel about them?

- Part of Collection:

[Summer](#)

- Subjects:

Adolescent Issues, Challenges and Overcoming Obstacles, Changes and New Experiences, Death, Grief, Loss, Main Idea and Details, Plot, Character, Setting, Story Elements, Expository Writing, Literary Response, Growing Up, Disabilities, Mental Health, Siblings, Friends and Friendship, Understanding Self and Others, Social and Emotional Development, Developmental Problems and Disorders, Mental Disabilities

- Skills:

Literary Elements, Main Idea and Details, Plot, Character and Setting, Expository Writing