

# Southfield Public Library

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## *The fault in our stars by John Green*

*Discussion questions used at SPL June 9 and 10, 2015*

1. The title of the book is taken in part from William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*. Are you familiar with this quote? What do you think this means as it relates to the storyline? What is the author trying to say by choosing this quote and making it the title of the book?
2. This book talks about children with cancer / terminal illnesses which is a hard subject to talk about. Did you find it hard to read? What part was most difficult, if any? Are there parts of the story that you found uplifting? Which parts?
3. How well does the author capture teenager life and feelings? Has he written the characters authentically? What things do you think the author got right in his portrayals/characterizations?
4. Are there any parts of the book that you found resonates with your own memories of being an adolescent and or teenager? For example, how adults underestimate kids.
5. What impact would the story have if it were told from the perspective of Isaac or one of the other characters? Is the story about Hazel? Gus? Families dealing with terminal illnesses? Cancer? None of the above? All of the above? And, more. Who or what do you think the book is about?
6. Hazel states that she hates "cancer books". What kind of book do you think this is? Is this a love story? If so, who's love story? Would you consider this book a romance novel?
7. The love between a parent and a child is a central focus of the book. Do you think the author does a convincing job of conveying this relationship? Describe a situation from the book that resonated with you as a parent or a child. Or that you related too.
8. One argument from the book is that "a short life can also be a good life". What are your thoughts on this statement?
9. What are your thoughts about Hazel's obsession with getting answers to her questions regarding her favorite book? Why do think it so important to Hazel to know what happens to the characters after the book ends? Have you ever felt the same way about a book as Hazel does?
10. Hazel realized that Peter Van Houten had dealt with a death of a child in his family which might account for his drinking and overall bad behavior. Does this excuse his behavior?
11. Peter tells Hazel, "Grief does not change you...It reveals you". Is this true? What are your thoughts about this quote? How has it revealed Hazel?
12. Hazel so excited that her mother is getting her degree. Why do you think that is? Hazel makes her parents promise they will stay together after her death. She states that she fears that her parents' will cease to exist if they are not "parents" upon her death. Do people/teenagers think like that or is this a fictional writer's device to add to the drama/plot?
13. The book ends with two words, "I do." Why do you think the author ended it like that?

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## *General discussion questions*

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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*Title: The fault in our stars by John Green*

*Discussion questions taken from LitLovers*

*website address: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/15-young-adult-fiction/8711-fault-in-our-stars-green?start=3>*

1. John Green derives his book's title from a famous line in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." (I,ii,139-140). What does the line mean—and why would Green have used it for his title? Even more important, why would he have altered it to read, "The fault in our stars" rather than ourselves? How does Green's meaning differ from Shakespeare's?
2. How would you describe the two main characters, Hazel and Gus? Do either of them conform, in behavior or thinking, to what we normally associate with young cancer patients? How do the two differ from one another...and how do their personality traits and interests complement each other?
3. How do Hazel and Gus each relate to their cancer? Do they define themselves by it? Do they ignore it? Do they rage at life's unfairness? Most importantly, how do the two confront the big questions of life and death?
4. Do you find some of the descriptions of pain, the medical realities that accompany cancer, or the discussion of bodily fluids too graphic?
5. At one point, Hazel says, "Cancer books suck." Is this a book about cancer? Did you have trouble picking up the book to read it? What were you expecting? Were those expectations met...or did the book alter your ideas?
5. John Green uses the voice of an adolescent girl to narrate his story. Does he do a convincing job of creating a female character?
7. Hazel considers *An Imperial Affliction* "so special and rare that advertising your affection for it feels like a betrayal." Why is it Hazel's favorite book? Why is it so important that she and Gus learn what happens after its heroine dies? Have you ever felt the same way about a book as Hazel does—that it is too special to talk about?
8. What do you think about Peter Van Houten, the fictional author of *An Imperial Affliction*? This book's real author, John Green, has said that Van Houten is a "horrible, horrible person but I have an affection for him." Why might Green have said that? What do you think of Van Houten?
9. Green once served as a chaplain in a children's hospital, working with young cancer patients. In an interview, he referred to the "hero's journey within illness"—that "in spite of it, you pull yourself up and continue to be alive while you're alive." In what way does Green's comment apply to his book—about two young people who are dying? Is theirs a hero's journey? Is the "pull yourself up" phrase an unseemly statement by someone, like the author or any reader, who is not facing a terminal disease?
10. What did you make of the book's humor? Is it appropriate...or inappropriate? Green has said he "didn't want to use humor to lighten the mood" or "to pull out the easy joke" when things got hard. But, he said, he likes to write about "clever kids, [and they] tend to be funny even when things are rough." Is his use of humor successful? How did it affect the way you read the book?
11. After his chaplaincy experience, Green said he believed that "life is utterly random and capricious, and arbitrary." Yet he also said, after finishing *The Fault in Our Stars* that he no longer feels that life's randomness "robs human life of its meaning...or that it robs even lives of people who don't get to have full lives." Would you say that the search for meaning—even, or especially, in the face of dying—is what this book explores? Why...or why not?
12. How do Hazel and Gus change, in spirit, over the course of the novel?
13. Talk about how you experienced this book? Is it too sad, too tragic to contemplate? Or did you find it in some way uplifting?