

Talking about *A Little Princess*

by Frances Hodgson Burnett · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/a-little-princess/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Sara tells stories so vividly the other girls forget where they are. What story would you tell to make this room disappear?
2. If you lived in Sara's bare attic, what's the first thing you'd pretend it into?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. Sara says being a princess has nothing to do with silk dresses. It's how you behave when everything is taken away. Miss Minchin never once understands what she means. Do you? Try to say it in your own words.
2. When Sara is rich, being kind is easy. The book takes away everything she has to find out what's underneath. What's the difference between being nice and being good?
3. Starving, Sara finds a coin, buys six buns, and gives five to a beggar girl who is hungrier. Is that too much? Where's the line between generous and unwise, and did she cross it?
4. Miss Minchin flatters Sara when she's rich and starves her when she's poor, and thinks of herself as a respectable woman the whole time. How do people convince themselves they're being fair when they're not?
5. Sara's pretending isn't running away from the attic. It's how she survives it. When is imagination a strength, and when would it tip into hiding?

The big one

Save it for last.

Sara's rule is that she'll be a princess on the inside no matter what happens on the outside: courteous to the cruel, generous with nothing, unbeaten on the coldest night. What's your version of that rule, the thing you'd keep being on your worst day, when nobody would blame you for quitting it?

Do it *together*

Work the Magic. One night, while Sara sleeps, her attic is transformed (warm fire, hot supper, thick blankets) by someone who slips away unseen. She calls it the Magic. This week, each of you performs one piece of Magic for someone else in the house: something made better, secretly, with no credit taken. At the next book club, everyone guesses who did what. The best Magic, Sara would insist, is the kind that's never solved.