

Talking about *Five Children and It*

by E. Nesbit · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/five-children-and-it/

Warming *up*

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

1. One wish a day, and it wears off at sunset. What are you spending today's on?
2. Would you rather have a helper who is kind but slow, or one who is brilliant, ancient, and extremely rude to you the whole time?

The real *conversation*

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

1. Every wish goes wrong, and the Psammead never cheats once — the children just don't finish the sentence. Tell about a time you got exactly what you asked for and it turned out not to be what you wanted.
2. The children wish to be 'as beautiful as the day,' and then Martha won't let them into their own house, because she has no idea who they are. What is it that people actually recognise you by? What would have to change before someone at this table didn't know you?
3. They wish for gold and cannot spend a penny of it — the coins are the wrong ones, and no shopkeeper believes children came by a sackful of guineas except by stealing them. Why isn't having the money the same as being able to use it?
4. Anthea wishes that everybody would want the Lamb, and instantly everybody does: the gipsies, the lady in the carriage, strangers on the road. Is being wanted by everyone a good thing to wish on a person?
5. Nothing the children do can last, because the sun always goes down on it. Does that make the day matter more, or less? Would you take a magic that stuck, knowing you could not undo it?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Look at what these children actually wish for: to be beautiful, to be rich, to be big, to be grown up, to be wanted. Not one of those is a silly thing to want, and the book never laughs at them for wanting it — it laughs at how they ask. So go round the table: what does each person here genuinely want just now? And what would have to be true about getting it for it to make you happy on the far side?

Do it *together*

Find the loophole. The children lose every round on wording, so play the other side. Each person writes one wish, in one sentence, on a slip of paper. Everyone else is the Psammead: read it aloud and grant it in the most literal, most maddening way the words allow — 'I wish I were taller' gets you taller than the ceiling. Then the wisher rewrites it to close the hole, and the table attacks it again. Keep going until nobody can break it. Youngest goes first, and youngest gets to be Psammead the most, because it is the better job.