

Talking about *Heidi*

by Johanna Spyri · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/heidi/

Warming *up*

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

1. Cheese toasted golden over an open fire, a hay bed under a round window, goats with names. Which piece of Heidi's mountain would you take for yourself?
2. Who would you rather spend a week with: the Alm-Uncle or Clara's grandmamma? (There's no wrong answer, but there is an interesting one.)

The real *conversation*

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

1. The whole village is afraid of the Alm-Uncle. Heidi simply isn't, and he turns out to be worth not fearing. What does she see that the village doesn't? Or does he change because she isn't afraid?
2. In Frankfurt, Heidi has everything (soft beds, white bread, servants, lessons) and she gets so homesick she starts walking in her sleep. What exactly was she missing? Can you be homesick for a way of being, not just a place?
3. Heidi hoards soft white rolls for Grandmother until they go stale in her wardrobe. It's a mistake, and it's also exactly right. What was she really trying to save?
4. Clara's family surrounds her illness with cushions, doctors, and worry. The mountain hands her a goat cup of milk and expects her to try. Which helped more, and is there such a thing as too much care?
5. Heidi couldn't learn her letters in Frankfurt, then learns to read almost at once when there's a grandmother who needs hymns read aloud. What's something you only really learned because you loved someone?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Heidi changes every person she meets (the Uncle, Clara, the doctor, the grandmother) without once setting out to change anybody. She just insists, cheerfully, on things being alive and people being kind. How does that work? And who is the Heidi at this table?

Do it *together*

Pack the grandmother's basket. Heidi's first thought on getting anything good was who needed it more: soft rolls for a grandmother who couldn't chew hard bread. Pick one person outside your house who's missing some small comfort, assemble it together, and deliver it in person. One rule, and it's Heidi's: don't make a fuss about it. The visit matters as much as the basket.