

Talking about *The Jungle Book*

by Rudyard Kipling · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/jungle-book/

Warming up

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

1. Pick your teacher: Baloo (naps between lessons), Bagheera (quiet and slightly dangerous), or Kaa (strange, slow, and always right)?
2. The book isn't only Mowgli; there's the mongoose, the white seal, the elephant dance. Which non-Mowgli story is the best one, and what's your case?

The real conversation

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

1. The Law of the Jungle sounds strict, but every animal who follows it knows exactly where they stand. The Bandar-log monkeys have no law at all, and nobody respects or even listens to them. What is the book saying about rules?
2. Mowgli belongs to the jungle and to the world of people, and is never fully at home in either. What does it cost to belong to two worlds? Do you know anyone who does?
3. Shere Khan is huge and feared, but he mostly gets his way by talking weaker animals into things. What's the difference between being feared and being respected, and which one actually keeps you safe in this book?
4. Rikki-tikki fights the cobras because that is simply what a mongoose does; the book loves characters who are completely themselves. Do the animals in these stories get to choose who they are? Do people?
5. Mowgli's great weapon is fire, the Red Flower, the one thing every animal fears and no animal can hold. The night he picks it up, something between him and the jungle breaks for good. Why?

The big one

Save it for last.

When Mowgli finally has to leave, he cries, and he doesn't understand his own tears: 'Am I dying, Bagheera?' In this book, growing up means leaving a place you love and were loved. Does it always? What would you say to Mowgli on that hillside?

Do it *together*

Write your family's Law of the Jungle. The jungle's Law is a chant of short, blunt rules: 'the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.' Write your family's version: each person proposes two laws, the table votes each one in or out, and the survivors get written up big and posted where the pack eats. Review it at every book club; the Law, Baloo would remind you, must be learned by heart.