

Talking about *Pollyanna*

by Eleanor H. Porter · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/pollyanna/

Warming *up*

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

1. Pollyanna is given the bare attic room — no carpet, no pictures, no mirror — and decides the view out the window beats any picture anyone could hang. If you had to move into the worst room in this house tomorrow, what would you decide to like about it?
2. Who would you rather have turn up at your door: Nancy, who tells you everything she isn't supposed to; Mr. Pendleton, whose house is full of strange things from far away; or Jimmy Bean, who has nowhere in particular to be?

The real *conversation*

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

1. The game starts with crutches. Pollyanna wanted a doll, the barrel sent crutches, and her father told her to be glad she didn't need them. Is that a kind thing to say to a child, or is it a way of telling her to stop wanting things? Everyone answer, grown-ups included.
2. Aunt Polly puts a newly orphaned eleven-year-old in a bare attic and tells herself the whole time that she is a good woman doing her duty. She never once catches herself being unkind. What does someone have to believe about themselves to manage that — and has anyone here ever done a smaller version of it?
3. The Ladies' Aid would rather send money to boys in India than take in Jimmy Bean, because the money abroad goes in the report and the boy down the road does not. Why is it easier to help someone far away? What's our version of that?
4. When Pollyanna finds out she may never walk, she can't play the game and tells people so. Was that the game failing her, or was it the first time she'd really needed it? What would you actually say to somebody who told you they'd run out of things to be glad about — not the nice thing, the true thing?
5. Pollyanna kept stopping at a house on the Pendleton Hill road that the respectable families in town walked straight past, because nobody had told her she was supposed to walk past it. Is there a house, or a person, that you've been steered away from without ever being given a reason?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

Pollyanna's father counted eight hundred places in the Bible that told him to rejoice, and he counted them on a day he felt terrible — he wasn't collecting proof that life was good, he was building something to hold on to for later. Everyone at this table has some version of that: a thing you reach for when it gets bad. What is yours, and does anybody else here know what it is?

Do it *together*

The Hard Ones. Pollyanna's own rule is that the game only really counts when it's difficult — "the harder 'tis, the more fun 'tis to get 'em out." So: everyone writes on a slip of paper one thing from this week that they genuinely cannot find anything glad about, folds it, and drops it in a jar unsigned. Next time you sit down together, each person draws somebody else's slip and makes a real attempt at it out loud. Two rules, both taken from the book. You are allowed to fail — Pollyanna does, for six chapters. And the person who wrote the slip gets the last word on whether the answer actually helped, because Nancy is right that being told to cheer up and being helped are not the same thing.