



Email: [bridget@paperdragonreads.com](mailto:bridget@paperdragonreads.com) Phone: (407) 212-7759

## Family Discussion Guide for "The Firefly Summer"

*Conversation starters for parents and children*

### Getting Started

#### What This Book Is About

"The Firefly Summer" tells the story of Ryanna Stuart, who accepts an unexpected invitation to spend the summer with her estranged grandparents at their old summer camp in the Poconos. Instead of the quiet summer she expected, Ryanna discovers a treasure trove of relatives eager to share memories of her late mother, uncovers family secrets, and even finds a real treasure map. Through this journey, she learns about her family's past and discovers where she truly belongs.

#### Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Family connections:** How we're linked to relatives we may not know well, and how family stories shape our identity
- **Discovering your roots:** The importance of understanding where you come from to know where you're going
- **Healing old wounds:** How misunderstandings can grow over time and the courage needed to repair relationships
- **Finding where you belong:** Sometimes home is where you least expect it
- **Summer transformation:** How stepping out of your comfort zone can lead to personal growth
- **Memory and legacy:** How the people we've lost continue to live through the stories others tell

**Tip for Parents:** Let your child's curiosity guide the conversation. If they're fascinated by the treasure map aspect, explore that alongside the deeper family themes.

### Character Connection Questions

#### About Ryanna

- How do you think Ryanna felt when she first received the letter from her grandparents?
- What would you pack if you were going to spend a summer with relatives you'd never met?
- Why do you think Ryanna wanted to learn about her mom so badly?
- How does Ryanna change throughout the summer? What helps her grow?



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### **About Family Relationships**

- What do you think caused the rift between Ryanna's father and her grandparents?
- How do the relatives' memories help Ryanna understand her mother better?
- Which family member would you most want to meet? Why?
- How do you think Ryanna's relationship with her father might change after this summer?

### **Big Ideas to Explore**

#### **Family and Belonging**

- Ryanna discovers that "the last place you expected to be is the place where you really belong." What do you think this means?
- How is family more than just the people you live with?
- What family stories do you know about your parents or grandparents when they were your age?
- How do you think knowing these stories helps you understand yourself?

#### **Memory and Legacy**

- Why do you think it was important for Ryanna to learn about her mother?
- How do the stories people tell about someone help keep their memory alive?
- What stories would you want people to tell about you?
- How can someone who isn't alive anymore still influence your life?

#### **Summer Transformation**

- What makes summer a special time for change and discovery?
- How does the camp setting help Ryanna's growth?
- What's the bravest thing Ryanna does during her summer?
- Have you ever had an experience that changed how you see yourself?

### **Fun Conversation Starters**

#### **Adventure and Mystery**

- If you found a real treasure map, what would you do?
- What kind of treasure do you think would be most exciting to find?
- Besides the literal treasure map, what other "treasures" does Ryanna discover?
- What would make the perfect summer adventure for you?

#### **Personal Connections**

- Have you ever stayed somewhere new for an extended time? How did it feel?
- What would you most want to know about a parent or relative you'd never met?
- If you could spend a summer anywhere, where would it be and why?



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- What family mystery would you most like to solve?

### **The Setting**

- How does the summer camp setting add to the story?
- What do you think fireflies represent in the story?
- Would you want to spend a summer at a lakeside camp? What would you do there?
- How do places hold memories?

### **Discussion Activities**

#### **Family Connections**

- Create a family tree together and share stories about relatives
- Look through family photos and discuss what you notice about family resemblances or personalities
- Interview grandparents or older relatives about their childhood memories

#### **Real-World Thinking**

- Research summer camps in your area—what activities would interest you most?
- Plan a family adventure or mystery hunt in your own community
- Discuss: How do families stay connected across distances or time?
- Talk about places that are special to your family and why

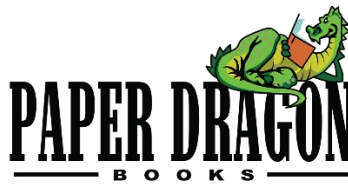
### **Conversation Tips for Parents**

#### **Creating Safe Spaces**

- **Be open about complex family dynamics** - children often sense more than we think they do
- **Share age-appropriate family stories** - both happy memories and gentle explanations of challenges
- **Validate feelings about family situations** - it's okay to acknowledge that family can be complicated
- **Follow your child's lead** - if they want to know more about family history, explore it together

#### **Encouraging Deep Thinking**

- **Ask about feelings:** "How do you think Ryanna felt when..."
- **Make connections:** "How is this like our family?" or "How is this different?"
- **Wonder together:** "I wonder why the author chose to..." or "What do you think would have happened if...?"
- **Explore motivations:** "Why do you think that character made that choice?"



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### **Making It Personal**

- **Share your own family stories** about discovery, belonging, or summer experiences
- **Connect to your values:** "This reminds me of why our family believes..."
- **Plan related activities:** visit family members, explore local history, create your own family story collection

### **Questions by Age Group**

#### **For Younger Readers (Ages 8-10)**

Focus on adventure elements and basic family connections:

- What was the most exciting part of Ryanna's summer?
- How do the relatives help Ryanna feel welcome?
- What would you put in a treasure chest?
- How does Ryanna make friends during her summer?

#### **For Older Readers (Ages 11-14)**

Explore deeper themes and emotional complexity:

- How do family secrets affect relationships across generations?
- What does Ryanna learn about forgiveness and second chances?
- How does understanding her mother's past change Ryanna's view of herself?
- What responsibilities do we have to maintain family connections?

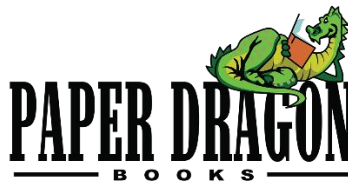
### **Handling Sensitive Topics**

#### **If Your Family Has Experienced Loss**

- Acknowledge that losing a parent is difficult and that Ryanna's experience might bring up feelings
- Emphasize that everyone grieves differently and there's no "right" way to remember someone
- Focus on how memories and stories keep people alive in our hearts
- Be prepared to share your own memories if appropriate

#### **If Your Family Has Experienced Estrangement**

- Explain that sometimes families disagree and it can take time to work things out
- Emphasize that this doesn't mean people stop loving each other
- Focus on themes of forgiveness and understanding different perspectives
- Avoid placing blame and focus on hope for healing



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### **Remember**

"The Firefly Summer" offers wonderful opportunities to discuss family, belonging, and personal growth. Use these conversations as a chance to strengthen your own family bonds by sharing stories, creating new memories, and showing your child that every family has its own unique treasure map of experiences and connections.

The best discussions happen when children feel safe to ask questions and share their thoughts. Let the book be a bridge to deeper conversations about what makes your family special and how each person contributes to your family's ongoing story.