



**Georgetown Township Public Library  
Book Discussion Guide**  
*The Glass Castle*  
Jeannette Walls (2005)

**About This Book**

**The Glass Castle** is a remarkable memoir of resilience and redemption, and a revelatory look into a family at once deeply dysfunctional and uniquely vibrant. When sober, Jeannette's brilliant and charismatic father captured his children's imagination, teaching them physics, geology, and how to embrace life fearlessly. But when he drank, he was dishonest and destructive. Her mother was a free spirit who abhorred the idea of domesticity and didn't want the responsibility of raising a family.

The Walls children learned to take care of themselves. They fed, clothed, and protected one another, and eventually found their way to New York. Their parents followed them, choosing to be homeless even as their children prospered.

**The Glass Castle** is truly astonishing -- a memoir permeated by the intense love of a peculiar, but loyal, family. Jeannette Walls has a story to tell, and tells it brilliantly, without an ounce of self-pity.

**From:** <http://readinggroupguides.com>

**About the Author**

Jeannette Walls lives in Virginia and is married to the writer John Taylor. She is a regular contributor to MSNBC and has worked at several publications, including *Esquire*, *USA Today*, and *New York*. Since the publication of **The Glass Castle**, Walls has published two novels, **Half Broke Horses** and **The Silver Star**.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Though **The Glass Castle** is brimming with unforgettable stories, which scenes were the most memorable for you? Which were the most shocking, the most inspiring, the funniest?
2. Discuss the metaphor of a glass castle and what it signifies to Jeannette and her father. Why is it important that, just before leaving for New York, Jeannette tells her father that she doesn't believe he'll ever build it? (p. 238).
3. The first story Walls tells of her childhood is that of her burning herself severely at age three, and her father dramatically takes her from the hospital: "You're safe now" (p. 14). Why do you think she opens with that story, and how does it set the stage for the rest of the memoir?
4. Rex Walls often asked his children, "Have I ever let you down?" Why was this question (and the required "No, Dad" response) so important for him -- and for his kids? On what occasions did he actually come through for them?
5. Jeannette's mother insists that, no matter what, "life with your father was never boring" (p. 288). What kind of man was Rex Walls? What were his strengths and weaknesses, his flaws and contradictions?
6. Discuss Rose Mary Walls. What did you think about her description of herself as an "excitement addict"? (p. 93).
7. Though it portrays an incredibly hardscrabble life, **The Glass Castle** is never sad or depressing. Discuss the tone of the book, and how do you think that Walls achieved that effect?
8. Describe Jeannette's relationship to her siblings and discuss the role they played in one another's lives.
9. In college, Jeannette is singled out by a professor for not understanding the plight of homeless people; instead of defending herself, she keeps quiet. Why do you think she does this?
10. The two major pieces of the memoir -- one half set in the desert and one half in West Virginia -- feel distinct. What effect did such a big move have on the family -- and on your reading of the story? How would you describe the shift in the book's tone?
11. Were you surprised to learn that, as adults, Jeannette and her siblings remained close to their parents? Why do you think this is?
12. What character traits -- both good and bad -- do you think that Jeannette inherited from her parents? And how do you think those traits shaped Jeannette's life?
13. For many reviewers and readers, the most extraordinary thing about **The Glass Castle** is that, despite everything, Jeannette Walls refuses to condemn her parents. Were you able to be equally nonjudgmental?
14. Like Mary Karr's **Liars' Club** and Rick Bragg's **All Over But the Shoutin'**, Jeannette Walls' **The Glass Castle** tells the story of a wildly original (and wildly dysfunctional) family with humor and compassion. Were there other comparable memoirs that came to mind? What distinguishes this book?

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**Resources for additional information about book discussion choices and authors:**

**Books & Authors** (Access through links to MeL Databases on Library's webpage.)  
<http://bna.galegroup.com/bna/>

**LitLovers.com**  
[www.litlovers.com](http://www.litlovers.com)

**Overbooked.com**  
<http://www.overbooked.com>

**Penguin.com (USA)**  
<http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/bookclubs/index.html>

**Reading Group Center**  
<http://reading-group-center.knopfdoubleday.com>

**Reading Group Guides**  
<http://www.readinggroupguides.com>

**Suggested print resources:**

*The Book Club Companion: A Comprehensive Guide to the Reading Group Experience*  
Diana Loevy  
**374.22 Loevy 2006**

*The Book Group Book: A Thoughtful Guide to Forming and Enjoying a Stimulating Book Discussion Group*  
Ellen Slezak (editor)  
**374.22 Book 2000**

*Good Books Lately: The One-Stop Resource for Book Groups and Other Greedy Readers*  
Ellen Moore and Kira Stevens  
**374.22 Moore 2004**

*Read It and Eat: A Month-by-Month Guide to Scintillating Book Club Selections and Mouthwatering Menus*  
Sarah Gardner  
**028.9 Gardner 2005**

*The Reading Group Handbook: Everything You Need to Know, From Choosing Members to Leading Discussions*  
Rachel W. Jacobsohn  
**374.22 Jacobsohn 1994**

*What Do I Read Next?* (Multi-volume set, annual editions)  
Gale Research Inc.  
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