

Discussion Questions

These questions are thinking questions, not retrieval questions. None of them have a right answer. They're designed for classroom discussion, family conversation, homeschool use, or a reader working through the book alone. The goal isn't to check comprehension. It's to practice the skill each chapter teaches.

You don't need to use all the questions. Pick the one or two that feel most alive for the group in front of you.

Introduction—The Two Thinking Muscles

The case for learning both kinds of thinking at the same time

1. Think of something you're genuinely good at. Did you get good at it by figuring things out (critical) or by making things up (creative), or both? What does that tell you about how you think?
2. The Introduction says most people are good at one kind of thinking and not the other. Which one do you think you lean toward? How do you know?
3. The book's thesis is that real thinking is a team sport. Even when you're alone. What does it mean to have a team inside your head? Does that idea make sense to you, or does it seem strange?
4. Have you ever lowered your hand in class, or stayed quiet somewhere, because you weren't sure enough? What would have happened if you'd said the thing anyway?

Chapter 1—The Problem You Have Isn't the Problem You Think

Separating the surface problem from the real one

1. Think of a problem you've tried to fix more than once, and it kept coming back. Looking back, do you think you were solving the real problem or a symptom of it?

2. The chapter describes two ways a wrong problem hides: behind a more interesting story, or behind an obvious next step. Which of those traps do you fall into more often?
3. The three clues are: it comes back, it came too fast, it's too good a story. Can you think of a time when one of those clues was there but you missed it?
4. Is there a problem in your life right now that might not be the real problem? What would you find if you asked: "What if this isn't the real problem?"

Chapter 2—Looking vs. Noticing

Active observation as a trainable skill

1. After reading this chapter, did you notice something in a familiar place that you'd never seen before? What was it, and why do you think you missed it before?
2. The chapter lists five kinds of trained noticers: detectives, doctors, scientists, artists, inventors. Is there someone in your life who notices things other people miss? What do you think makes them that way?
3. Noticing is described as a choice. Do you agree? Can you decide to notice something, or does it just happen?
4. What's the difference between looking at something and really seeing it? Where in your daily life do you think you're mostly just looking?

Chapter 3—Noticing What's Wrong vs. Noticing What Could Be Different

The two flavors of NOTICE—critical and creative

1. Think of something in your home or school that bothers you. Are you trying to figure out why it's that way (path one) or what you could do about it (path two)? Which path are you on by default?

2. The chapter says most people collapse the two paths into “one mushy half-job.” Have you experienced that, starting to diagnose something and ending up just listing complaints, or starting to brainstorm and never actually understanding the cause?
3. Can you think of a situation where switching paths (from why to what if, or from what if to why) changed everything? What happened?
4. Which question comes more naturally to you: asking why something is the way it is, or asking what could make it different? Does it depend on the situation?

Chapter 4—The Real Problem Is Almost Never Obvious

The value of one beat of pause

1. Think of a time you acted immediately on a problem, and it made things worse. What would have been different if you’d taken ten seconds first?
2. The chapter distinguishes between the feeling of urgency and the fact of urgency. How do you tell the difference in the moment? Is it possible to tell?
3. When is acting fast actually the right call? What makes a problem a genuine emergency versus one that just feels like one?
4. The chapter says your brain is wired to feel like every problem is an emergency. Do you notice that in yourself? What does it feel like when it’s happening?

Chapter 5—Being Wrong Is How You Get Smarter

Reframing wrongness as the engine of learning

1. The chapter says a lot of the flinch—the embarrassment of being wrong—gets taught over time. Do you believe that? Can you remember when being wrong started to feel different than it did when you were younger?

2. There's a difference between "I was wrong" and "An idea of mine was wrong." Does that distinction feel real to you, or does it feel like the same thing in practice?
3. Think of something you know how to do well. How many times were you wrong before you got there? Do those wrong attempts feel like failures to you now, or like something else?
4. The chapter asks you to decide not to inherit the flinch. Is that a real choice? What would it actually take to make that decision and stick to it?
5. Who do you know who handles being wrong well? What do they do differently from most people?

Chapter 6—Ten Wrong Ideas Beat One Right One

Real brainstorming and finding the seed

1. Have you ever been in a real brainstorm, where no idea was filtered before it landed on the table? What was different about it compared to normal problem-solving?
2. The chapter says the wrong ideas are the runway for the right one. Can you think of a time when a bad idea led you to a good one, either in your own thinking or someone else's?
3. What makes it hard to say a weird idea out loud in a group? Is it harder with some people than others? What makes the difference?
4. The Beat Baz box asks you to find the seed in someone else's idea rather than your own. Why is that harder? What does it take to see value in an idea you didn't have?

Chapter 7—Saying It Out Loud When You're Not Sure

The courage to think in public

1. Think of a half-idea you've swallowed. Something you started to say and then didn't. What stopped you? What would have happened if you'd said it?
2. The chapter says the crowd in your imagination is usually tougher than the crowd in the room. Is that true in your experience? What does the imagined crowd do that the real one usually doesn't?
3. What's the difference between an idea that isn't ready and an idea you're too afraid to say? How do you tell which is which?
4. The chapter is built around saying the half-formed idea out loud. Have you ever been in a room where that happened, where one uncertain voice changed the direction of the whole conversation?
5. If you started saying "I'm not sure, but..." more often, what do you think would actually happen? What's the worst realistic outcome?

Chapter 8—Wild Ideas Are Required, Not Optional

Getting to ten ideas and the wild-idea muscle

1. The chapter says most kids have the wild-idea muscle and it's easy to lose. Do you see that in the adults around you? When did it seem to happen?
2. Think of something you own or use every day. What would a wild idea for improving it look like? What would a reasonable idea look like? Which one is harder to think of?
3. The chapter argues that the wild idea isn't a detour from thinking. It's what thinking looks like when it's working. Do you agree? Is there a risk to that argument?
4. Velcro and the smartphone both started as ideas that sounded ridiculous. How do you tell the difference between a wild idea worth chasing and one worth dropping?

Chapter 9—Expanding What Already Exists

Creativity as addition and combination, not invention from scratch

1. The chapter redefines creativity to include adding to what works and combining what exists. Does that change how creative you think you are? Why or why not?
2. Think of something you use every day. What was the last thing someone added to it? What could be added to it that hasn't been yet?
3. The pencil-with-eraser example is two existing things stuck together. Can you think of something in your life that's just two things combined? How did it change the two original things?
4. The chapter says almost all progress is people building on other people's work. Does that feel like a limitation or a freedom? Does it change what you think you're capable of?

Chapter 10—How Do You Know?

Source evaluation and the four-word question

1. Think of something you believe is true. Ask yourself: how do you know? Where did it come from? How far back can you trace it before you hit fog?
2. The chapter describes three weak answers to “how do you know”: everybody knows that, I saw it on a video, my friend told me. Which of those do you encounter most often? Which do you use most often yourself?
3. The chapter says asking “how do you know” can sound like an accusation. How do you ask it in a way that sounds curious rather than combative? Does it depend on who you're asking?
4. Have you ever repeated something confidently and then found out you couldn't actually explain where you got it? What happened? What did you do?

Chapter 11—Your Favorite-Team Brain

Confirmation bias and how to work against it

1. Think of something you have a strong opinion about. If you're honest, have you been looking for evidence that supports it or evidence that challenges it? What would it take to actively look for the other kind?
2. The chapter describes two things your brain does: it notices what confirms what you already think, and it remembers what confirms what you already think. Which one do you think is harder to catch yourself doing?
3. Have you ever changed your mind about something because of evidence rather than because someone pressured you? What was the evidence, and what made it strong enough to change things?
4. The Switch Teams box asks you to argue for the other side for five minutes. What's the hardest topic you could try that with? What makes it hard?
5. In the sprinkler story, every fact in Dash's notes was true. And his answer was still wrong. How can that happen? Has it ever happened to you?

Chapter 12—The Loud One Only Sounds Sure

Confidence versus correctness

1. Think of someone in your life who sounds very certain about things. How often do they turn out to be right? Is their certainty a signal for you, or have you learned to discount it?
2. The chapter says thinking is the thing that slows you down, and that sounding sure is what you sound like when nothing has slowed you down yet. Does that match your experience?
3. Hedge words are described as accuracy words, not weakness words. Do you hear them that way in real life, or do they still feel like uncertainty? What would it take to change that?

4. The chapter distinguishes earned confidence (doctor, teacher, expert) from unearned confidence (Sully under the media cabinet). How do you tell which is which in practice? What questions help?

Chapter 13—Changing Your Mind Is a Strength

Evidence-based updating versus pressure-based folding

1. Think of something you used to believe and don't anymore. What changed it—evidence or pressure? How do you know which one it was?
2. Dash calls changing your mind based on evidence a reasonable answer followed by a better one, not one bad answer followed by a good one. Does that framing change how changing your mind feels?
3. What's the hardest belief you've ever had to update? What made it hard—the evidence itself, or what it would mean to be wrong?
4. The chapter distinguishes pressure updates from evidence updates and says pressure updates don't stick. Can you think of a time you changed what you said without changing what you actually thought?
5. Who do you know who updates their beliefs well? What do they do that makes it look like a strength rather than a weakness?

Chapter 14—The Popularity Trap

Saying what you saw when the room says otherwise

1. Think of a time you knew the answer and didn't say it because everyone around you was saying something else. What did that moment feel like? What happened to the answer?
2. Most of the people who went along with the group knew their answer was wrong while they were giving it. Why would somebody say a thing they can see isn't true? Have you ever done it?

3. The research found that one honest voice mostly stops the caving. Has someone ever been that voice for you, said the thing you were thinking so you could finally agree out loud? Have you been it for somebody else?
4. What's the difference between folding (saying what the room says) and actually changing your mind, like Chapter 13? How can you tell which one you just did?

Chapter 15—Sometimes the Answer Is a Different Question

Reframing and escaping the question cage

1. Think of a problem you've been stuck on. Write down the question you've been asking. Now write three completely different questions about the same situation. Does any of the new ones feel more solvable?
2. The chapter says the shape of your question shapes the answers you can find. Can you think of a time when you were asking the wrong question and didn't realize it until later? What unlocked it?
3. Baz asks whether you can just keep reframing forever and never solve anything. What's the answer? How do you know when to reframe and when to commit to the question you have?
4. The Rocky example shows that "how do I get him to stop" is a different question than "what does he actually want." Think of a relationship in your life where the second kind of question might open something the first kind can't.

Chapter 16—The Quiet One Sees What the Loud Ones Miss

Listening position and the listening mind

1. Think of a conversation where you committed to a position early and then couldn't see something that was obvious to someone outside it. What did they see that you missed?

2. The chapter describes the talking-mind and the listening-mind. Which one runs louder in you? In what situations does the listening-mind get a word in?
3. Have you ever been the quiet person in a group who saw something the loud ones missed? What stopped you from saying it sooner? What eventually made you say it?
4. The chapter says Phoebe isn't quieter because she's smarter or more experienced. She's quieter because she hasn't locked in. Is staying uncommitted a skill or a personality trait? Can it be learned?

Chapter 17—Disagreeing Without Fighting

Separating the idea from the person

1. Think of a disagreement that turned into a fight. At what point did it stop being about the idea and start being about the people? What would it have taken to keep the two separate?
2. The chapter gives three right-shape phrases and three wrong-shape phrases. Which wrong-shape phrase do you use most? Which right-shape phrase would be hardest for you to use naturally?
3. Chapter 7 said the crowd in your imagination is usually tougher than the crowd in the room. Is that also true for disagreement—do you imagine worse reactions than you actually get?
4. Think of someone in your life who disagrees well. What do they do that makes it feel safe to have a different opinion around them?
5. The hardest version of this chapter is disagreeing with someone who takes it personally even when you do everything right. Has that happened to you? What did you do?

Chapter 18—Sitting With Not Knowing

The advanced skill of holding an open question

1. Think of a question you genuinely don't know the answer to. Something real, not trivial. How uncomfortable is it to sit with that? What does your brain do with the discomfort?
2. The chapter distinguishes between not knowing yet and not knowing at all. Can you think of an example of each from your own experience?
3. The stilt-owl is an invented answer that fills a gap so the discomfort goes away. Have you ever invented a stilt-owl, reached for an explanation not because you had one but because the not-knowing was bothering you?
4. The chapter says the itch of not-knowing is what curiosity actually feels like. Do you experience it that way, or does not-knowing mostly just feel frustrating?
5. Is there something you've been not-knowing for a long time that you've stopped asking about? What made you stop?

The Last Chapter—Using All Four Together

All four skills running at once on a real problem

1. The Last Chapter shows NOTICE running twice. Once in critical mode to find the cause, once in creative mode to find the opportunity. Think of a problem in your own life. Is there an opportunity hiding inside it that you haven't looked for yet?
2. The book's thesis is that you can run all four dogs inside your own head. After eighteen chapters, which dog feels most natural to you? Which one do you have to work hardest to be?
3. Phoebe's reframe in The Last Chapter changes not just the answer but the goal. Think of something you've been working toward. Is there a Phoebe question, a reframe of the whole goal, that might change what you're building?

4. The Last Chapter tells you: “That’s the whole skill. It belongs to you now.” What does it feel like to own a skill? How is it different from just knowing about one?
5. Which chapter in the book hit you hardest? Not which skill was most useful—which one made you think about something you hadn’t thought about before?

The Last Find—The Ongoing Mystery, Solved

For after you’ve finished the whole book

1. Sully never threw his finds away. He hid them. And kept adding more. What’s the difference between hiding something and getting rid of it? What does that difference tell you about what Sully wanted the whole time?
2. Phoebe knew about the far corner long before anyone else, and she never said a word. Was staying quiet the kind thing to do, or should she have told the others? What would you have done?
3. In Chapter 12, Dash checked the far corner with his own eyes. And then kept what he saw to himself. When is keeping something to yourself the right call, and how do you know?