

The Great Fox Illusion

DISCUSSION GUIDE



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“A delightfully tricky tale of magic and misdirection.”

M. G. LEONARD

  @WalkerBooksUK

The Great Fox Illusion

JUSTYN EDWARDS

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Great Fox Illusion, part adventure, part mystery, brimming with sleight of hand and magic, is a modern-day *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. A televised competition for children with the quickest magical minds to work out the secrets of some of the greatest magic tricks seen. And the prize? The keys to the Great Fox's rambling mansion, inheriting his wealth and catalogue of illusions. But for Flick Lions, there's more at stake than just the prize, as somewhere in that house is the answer to why her father disappeared, and the stolen trick that he developed – the greatest magic trick of all time. Can Flick overcome sinister organizations, the mysterious Dominic Drake, a precocious pair of magic siblings and the accident that cost her her lower leg, to solve the riddles, save her father's memory and, in the process, become a great magician herself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justyn Edwards graduated from Southampton University with a degree in archaeology. Since then, he has worked as a caravan park attendant, a paperboy and a software engineer, but never as an archaeologist. He has always wanted to be a writer, and his inspiration for *The Great Fox Illusion* came from watching magic shows. He realized that what elevates the trick a magician performs is the story that he tells his audience. And in turn, stories themselves are a kind of magic trick, with the author choosing when to reveal his secrets to the reader. And so Justyn's debut novel was born. Justyn lives near Camborne, in Cornwall, with his wife and two cats. Visit his website at www.justynedwards.com or follow him on Twitter: [@justynedwards](https://twitter.com/justynedwards).

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Like any great trick, this book is packed with misdirection, sleight of hand and secrets that keep you guessing to the very end. There are plenty of themes and ideas for discussion, and group members should be encouraged to try to remember the reading journey, before the big reveals happened. There are also elements that may require sensitivity – Flick's disability, the accident that caused it, the absence of her father – any of these may relate to group members' lived experience, and care should be taken that group members feel comfortable. In advance of the discussion, you may like to prepare some additional resources in advance, e.g., YouTube clips of great magic acts, information about some of the magicians mentioned through the book. Bring some playing cards for the trick at the end of the book. You could even source some instructions for other basic magic tricks for the group to try or to practise with one another.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

To begin, ask what members liked about the book. How would anyone describe the novel? Was it an adventure? A mystery? Can anyone expand on their answer? What was anyone's favourite part?

1. This book is a trick

"The question is, will you be able to work out how I did it?" – p.7

Check whether anyone has already read the solution to the escape that appears after the acknowledgements on the final pages. Ask anyone who has read it not to reveal the secret. Read through the preface on page 7 together. Discuss with the group any of the ways they've come up with for how Flick, Charlie and the Great Fox escaped. Share any clues that anyone spotted throughout the novel, and work out some ideas together, if you can! Or, if a large group, break into smaller groups to workshop ideas and present back to the others.

2. Flick Lions

"Flick let go. 'Now, I've got a competition to win.'" – p.14

How is Flick introduced in the novel? What were readers' first impressions of her? Discuss how the author portrays her, and gets the reader on her side. Lead members towards realizing we are in on *her* secret from the beginning; we are part of "her trick". How is she different from many protagonists? Why is it significant that she is a girl? What about her disability?

3. Charlie Riley

"Charlie thanked him and then immediately started to separate the items, making sure that the beans didn't touch his eggs or toast." – p.110

What about Charlie? Why is he so keen to win the competition? Why is Flick, and not Charlie, the main hero of the story? Discuss what makes a good protagonist. How would the book be different if it was all seen from Charlie's perspective – what would this be like? Consider how particular he is about food, for example, or how carried away he gets. Talk about the ways he and Flick are different from each other. (As a continuation exercise, you could ask members to write a chapter from Charlie's viewpoint, e.g., his first meeting with Flick.)

4. Synergy

"They do some pretty cool stuff. Looks very improvised, although of course it isn't." – p.44

Who are "Synergy" in the novel? What does the word "synergy" mean? (Have a definition to hand.) How do Harry and Ruby Townsend fit into this organization? Did anyone have any sympathy for the siblings? If so, why? Are Synergy any different to Dominic Drake? What does the novel suggest about the practices of magicians?

5. Misdirection

"The Great Fox had destroyed her family as surely as if he had pulled a trigger." – p.26

How does the understanding of the main characters change as the novel progresses? What assumptions get challenged? How about the reader – what assumptions do we make that prove to be false? Discuss how the author weaves these elements of misdirection into the book – what techniques does he use? What effect does this have? Can anyone think of any comparisons with other books they have read, or stories they know, that involve misdirection or false assumptions?

6. Structure

"... there is nothing out of the ordinary and everything is exactly as expected. Except, of course, we know none of that is true." – p.59

Look together at the section headings in the book, on pages 9, 59, 141 and 215. Discuss how a trick is constructed – what are the key stages in performing a trick, according to the book? Now introduce the idea of structuring a book – plotting. Can anyone draw comparisons between the two? Are these section explanations partly explaining the book, too? Don't forget the first line of the book, 'This book is a trick.' (This could open out into a wider discussion of plotting and structuring that would serve as a good launchpad for some creative writing exercises, or further exploration of narrative structures.)

7. The art of magic

"We surrender ourselves to the magician's control, for we will all play our part in the illusion." – p.9

Follow on from the previous question by asking, what makes a great magic trick? Has anyone seen any really good tricks performed? What happened? You might want to look at some clips online at this point, or share some ideas of "classic" magic tricks from history. Why are magic tricks so entertaining? What structure and plot, what parallels are there between a great magic trick and a great book? How are they similar? How different? Look at the quotation alongside this question; is an author a kind of magician?

8. Big reveals

"Well, I've got hundreds of ideas about how it might be done, but I'm just not sure which of them is—" – p.130

Did anyone in the group work out any of the tricks before they were revealed? If so, how? What clues had they spotted? What did they do to work it out? Did anyone have any alternative ways of solving the tricks set in the competition? Share ideas together.

9. Glamour and assistance

"Firstly, I don't think girls should even do magic. Girls make good assistants, but not showmen. The clue is in the name." – p.41

How does the novel invert some of the "norms" of magic tricks? Look at Dominic Drake's statements on page 41. Think about Charlie's ambitions in the world of magic – to be an assistant himself. Read page 64 together, as a group – is Flick right about famous magicians? Why does anyone think this is?

10. And for my next trick...

"He's very excited you're now part of the team, and he can't wait to see you." – p.281

What does anyone in the group think might happen in the next book? What could the Bell System be? What could Flick's father have been doing all this time?

11. Practice makes perfect

"The Great Fox always says preparation is the key to a good trick!" p.284

Give the group some time to practise the magic trick at the end of the book, or find other simple tricks that they can learn. Practise performing the tricks in small groups, and then show them to the rest of the group, or other people in your setting. You could even set a challenge to find and practise a new trick before your next group meeting, with a prize for the best performance!