



Discussion Questions for *The Big Dark* by Rodman Philbrick

Charlie's small town is baffled. Every spark of electricity has suddenly vanished, and now cars won't start, the heat has shut off, and the TV is blank. As people become desperate, lawlessness erupts and the pharmacy is torched by an arsonist. Charlie's mother will die without her medicine, so he heads off alone, traveling through brutal ice and snow. As he encounters a burned-out, looted city of terrified citizens, can he find the strength to save his mom?

- Charlie's New Year's Eve unfolds in a surprising way. Describe what happens and how Charlie and his family react. How do their reactions differ from those of other townsfolk?
- After the electricity goes out, Charlie's mother says, "We have to be prepared. Plan for the worst and hope for the best." In which ways does Charlie follow, and not follow, her advice?
- Charlie's mom, Mr. Kingman, and Mr. Bragg all play different roles in their community following the blackout. What kind of choices do they make, and how do their choices affect others? What do their actions reveal about their characters?
- Not long after the electricity goes out, Mrs. Adler's Superette store burns down. How does this suspicious event affect the community?
- Charlie discovers that Mr. Kingman has been deceiving the townsfolk about the efficacy of his crystal radio. Does the truth surprise you? Why or why not? Do you think Mr. Kingman's actions are justified?
- Discuss the dangers Charlie faces on his mission. How does he receive help and help others in turn?
- Mrs. Boncoeur says to Charlie, "A boy came down the mountain, a man goes back up." What do you think she means? Do you agree with her? Explain.
- Discuss Charlie's perception of Mr. Kingman. How does it evolve over the course of the story?
- Which scene from the book do you remember best? What makes it so memorable?
- Charlie's dad used to say, "Chin up." Think of a difficult situation where you were positive or brave. What happened? How did you grow from it?