

## Literature Circle Questions

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *Sahara Special* by Esme Raji Codell.

1. On the first day of school, Miss Pointy lists the class subjects on the board. What are these subjects?
2. Sahara says that her cousin Rachel Wells is her best friend. What is Rachel like? Describe Rachel and her friendship with Sahara.
3. Sahara has two files, one hidden in the library and one kept in the principal's office. What is in each of these files?
4. Why does Sahara cry the night before school starts? What kinds of things is she thinking and feeling?
5. At the beginning of the school year, why isn't Sahara doing any of her assignments for Miss Pointy, even though she really likes her teacher?
6. Why do you think Sahara took Luz's sticker? How does this incident affect her?
7. Sahara is writing a secret book of her own called *Heart-Wrenching Life Story and Amazing Adventures*. Do you know people who keep journals? Can you think of characters from other books you've read who have secret writings of their own? What are some reasons people might have private writings that they don't share with others?
8. What do you think is the most important thing Sahara needs to learn?
9. When Miss Pointy visits Sahara's house, she says that she's there to bring homework. Why is she really there? And what is the effect of her visit on Sahara?
10. Why does Sahara think so much about Darrell Sikes? Why does she read his journal? Besides the fact that they were both in special education, what do they have in common? How are they different?
11. On the day she meets her new teacher, Sahara writes that Miss Pointy "looked less like a teacher and more like one of those burnt-out punk-rocker teenagers who hang out in front of the Dunkin Donuts." Besides Miss Pointy's appearance, what is so unusual or surprising about her?
12. In the last chapter of the book, Sahara throws the letters to her father out the window. Why is this so important? If her father did contact her in the future, what do you think Sahara would say to him?

13. Do you think Miss Pointy should be allowed to dress, talk, and act like she does? Should she be more “professional” in any way? Do schools have rules about how teachers should dress and behave? Can you imagine a teacher like Miss Pointy at your school?
14. What parts of this book did you find humorous? Which of the characters make you laugh? Be prepared to talk about these parts of the book.
15. Sahara’s mother requests that her daughter be removed from the special ed program, and Miss Pointy lies to keep Darrell Sikes from leaving class to receive special ed services. Why are these characters so critical about the special education program? Do you agree that these programs might cause more harm than good, or do you think that the services are valuable for students?

*Note: These literature circle questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-10; Synthesis: 11-12; Evaluation 13-15.*

### **Activities**

1. Miss Pointy’s students are assigned to write about how they got their names. What do you know about your name? How did you get your name, and what does your name mean? Do you like your name? Does it fit you? If you could change it, what would you choose, and why? Write about your name.
2. Choose one of the scenes from Miss Pointy’s classroom – a humorous or important one -- to make into a reader’s theater or skit. Condense the scene if you want, assign roles, and practice reading your parts before you perform for the class. Afterwards, explain why you chose the scene you did. What makes that scene funny or significant? What did you learn about the characters from reading their words aloud?
3. Using what you know from her story, imagine Sahara Jones twenty years in the future. What is she like, and what is she doing? Write a newspaper or magazine article about the grown-up Sahara Jones, giving us a glimpse into her adult life. Illustrate your article with a newspaper-style “photo” of Sahara.

**Other Books by this Author:** *Educating Esme: Diary of a Teacher’s First Year, How to Get Your Child to Love Reading* (both published by Algonquin Books)

**Author Web site:** [www.planetesme.com/saharaspecial.html](http://www.planetesme.com/saharaspecial.html)

