



6700 Merle Hay Road, Johnston, IA 50131 • Voice: 515-278-5233 • Fax: 515-278-4975 • [info@johnstonlibrary.com](mailto:info@johnstonlibrary.com)

## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **Last Days of Summer** by Steve Kluger

#### Summary

Laced with nostalgia reminiscent of baseball's legends, "Last Days of Summer" is a story filled with emotion and leavened with humor about the small triumphs people can achieve by finding ways to connect with others.

Told in letters, notes, report cards, matchbook covers, postcards and telegrams, "Last Days of Summer" tells of the evolving relationship between two unlikely friends and an even more unlikely role model. A Jewish boy growing up in a tough Italian neighborhood, Joey Margolis lives with his mom and his elderly Aunt Carrie. Added to the regular beatings from neighborhood kids and other burdens weighing upon his young shoulders, he's troubled by Hitler's rising power, his parents' divorce, and an absent father who repeatedly lets him down. Craving a surrogate dad, Joey strikes up a correspondence with Charlie Banks, the third baseman for the New York Giants. That he does so by dint of persistently nagging Charlie sets the tone not just for their ongoing correspondence but for a relationship that will change both their lives forever.

#### Discussion Questions

1. When we first meet Joey Margolis, he's clearly a bright and sensitive little boy, despite his tough-guy posturing. How does he use these two sides of his personality to pursue the relationship with Charlie?
2. Despite Joey's initial pursuit of Charlie Banks and the ballplayer's antagonistic response, Charlie could just as easily have continued to ignore Joey's letters. Why didn't he? What did he find compelling in them?
3. By November of 1940, Joey and Charlie are just about ready to call it quits. What changes Charlie's mind? What convinces Joey to toe the line?
4. Very early on, Joey has decided that he's going on a road trip with Charlie Banks. He also knows that it's going to be the most significant thing that will ever happen to him. And he's right. What turning point does he reach when he's on the road with Charlie? How does his life change permanently?

5. Baseball in the Forties was a far different game than it is today, and the world was a much different place. Could a story like Last Days of Summer take place in the present? How would it be different?
6. Shortly after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, Craig Nakamura, his family, and 120,000 other Japanese-Americans are relocated to concentration camps. How likely is it that such a scenario could actually take place today?
7. Throughout the first part of the novel, Charlie becomes the father that Joey doesn't have. Yet shortly after the road trip, the roles begin to reverse. What are some examples of this change taking place? Who starts this process? How do both Joey and Charlie feel about the changes?
8. In Last Days of Summer Joey creates his own extended family. Who would you include on Joey's family tree? How would you define "family" as it means to the characters in this novel?
9. Knowing what we know about Charlie's own past, why does he eventually become so emotionally involved in Joey's life? What does he see in Joey?
10. We discover from the epilogue that Joseph Margolis has grown up to be a successful novelist and sportswriter, a devoted husband, and a loving father. How much of Joey's success would you attribute to his relationship with Charlie? Try to imagine how Joey's life might have turned out if he had never met Charlie Banks.

Summary and Discussion Questions from [www.readinggroupguides.com](http://www.readinggroupguides.com)