



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

## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **The Queen's Gambit** by Walter Tevis

#### Summary

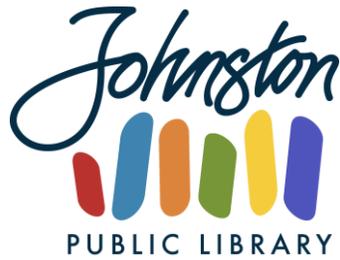
When she is sent to an orphanage at the age of eight, Beth Harmon soon discovers two ways to escape her surroundings, albeit fleetingly: playing chess and taking the little green pills given to her and the other children to keep them subdued. Before long, it becomes apparent that hers is a prodigious talent, and as she progresses to the top of the US chess rankings she is able to forge a new life for herself. But she can never quite overcome her urge to self-destruct. For Beth, there's more at stake than merely winning and losing.

#### Discussion Questions

1. What were your overall thoughts about the novel? Were you immediately into the book or did it take a while for you to connect to the story?
2. What were your thoughts about Beth? What about the character did you like or dislike?
3. What does chess symbolize in the novel?
4. Do you play chess? Does knowledge of the game make a difference to a person's reading of the book?
5. The novel pits addiction against talent to illuminate the destructive nature of addiction. Have you known people with addictions whose talents have suffered as a result?
6. Is this story more character-driven or plot-driven?
7. Discuss your thoughts on this quote from the novel:

*"It's an entire world of just 64 squares. I feel safe in it. I can control it; I can dominate it. And it's predictable. So, if I get hurt, I only have myself to blame."*

8. How does the novel compare with the Netflix television series?



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

9. Walter Tevis stated in an interview in 1983 with *The New York Times* that the story “is a tribute to brainy women.” What evidence from the book do you find that supports or disproves this idea in the 2020s?
  
10. The author wrote novels that were turned into films – *The Hustler*, *The Color of Money*, and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. Have you read any other books by Walter Tevis or seen any of his other movies? What comparisons would you draw between *The Queen’s Gambit* and his other works? If you haven’t read anything else by him, are you now considering it?

Discussion Questions created by staff of the Johnston Public Library