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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### Theo of Golden by Allen Levi

#### Summary

One spring morning, a stranger arrives in the small southern city of Golden. No one knows where he has come from...or why...

His name is Theo. And he asks a lot more questions than he answers.

Theo visits the local coffeehouse, where ninety-two pencil portraits hang on the walls, portraits of the people of Golden done by a local artist. He begins purchasing them, one at a time, and putting them back in the hands of their “rightful owners.” With each exchange, a story is told, a friendship born, and a life altered.

A story of giving and receiving, of seeing and being seen, *Theo of Golden* is a beautifully crafted novel about the power of creative generosity, the importance of wonder to a purposeful life, and the invisible threads of kindness that bind us to one another.

#### Discussion Questions

1. This story celebrates kindness. Describe your experience with random and/or generous acts of kindness.
2. Theo is an octogenarian. How do you envision your 80s? Do you think someone that age can be a difference maker? A compassionate person? A bestower of gifts? A good listener?
3. Rivers from his past and the river where he is living are mentioned right away in the prologue. We know that in literature, water is often a symbol of purity, life, rebirth, and regeneration. Theo walks by the river, and a bench by the fountain is his meeting place of choice. Do you notice other symbolism in the story?
4. Are you a gift giver? Would you rather give than receive? Could you accept a generous gift from a stranger? What is Theo’s reaction to gifts that others bestow on him?
5. After the first few bestowals, Theo reflects that he’s “stumbled onto his purpose as the newest resident of Golden.” Can you identify a strong purpose in your life? Do you think a purpose changes with the seasons or circumstances of life?

6. Theo spends considerable time enjoying “The Promenade” and learning the history of the town. Does your city or town have a vibrant and well-developed town center where residents congregate for entertainment and shopping? Do you know the history of your town?

7. Are you an artist or a person who appreciates art? What makes “good art”?

*Chapter 21: “It’s hard enough to define what art is, much less ‘good art.’ ...Maybe there are just good responses.... If it makes us better somehow, maybe that’s what gives it value.”  
“For anything to be good, truly good, there must be love in it.”*

8. Tony shares his Vietnam experiences with Theo. Have you had the opportunity to sit and talk with someone who has been in a war? Have you been in a war zone?

9. Share one time when you have performed a random act of kindness.

*Chapter 34: “The best portion of a good person’s life is the little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.” ~Wordsworth*

10. *Chapter 35: “So, you’re an expert in sadness?” Theo shrugged. “I suppose anyone as old as me could say the same.”*

Do you feel older individuals have experienced a great deal of sadness? Are these individuals experts at hiding it? Coping with it?

11. Mrs. Gidley’s attitude is slowly changing in the work she is doing for Theo. Is the joy of giving contagious?

*Chapter 36: “The more she bought into the goodness of the bestowals, a lightness crept into her disposition. There was a noticeable new enthusiasm about her work.”*

12. As the author reveals the character of Theo, what were your first impressions of Theo? Did you guess who he was or his purpose in Golden? Were you able to predict the big reveal?

13. What did you think about the final revelation (Theo’s relationship to the artist) and his motivations for buying and bestowing the art? Was it fair of Theo to keep this information from Asher? Or should he have disclosed his identity from the beginning? Did he think he had more time, or had he always planned to do it in a letter after his death? When all is revealed, did it affect your perception of Theo? Did it affect your reading experience?

14. It's interesting that Theo's experience as a young boy with the fisherman/artist was a bestowal. How did the words the fisherman/artist spoke to Theo affect his life? What do you think about Theo's interactions with individuals in the community? How did Theo's words affect the recipients? Which bestowal was your favorite or the most memorable? Do you think the bestowal to Theo as a youngster influenced him in the art of bestowals as an older man?
15. Theo is an excellent listener. Has Theo encouraged you to become a better listener? Theo also notices the beauty around him in the smallest details. Can you identify five beautiful things you have noticed today?
16. What is the most important message in the book? Is there an underlying theme that permeates everything else? What are the most important and thoughtful themes in the story? Which one resonates with you the most?
17. When Kendrick had to give a victim statement to the court, his grandmother advised him to err on the side of mercy if forced to choose between mercy and justice. Theo exhorts Kendrick to be as kind as he can. What is your opinion about the advice?
18. Has reading *Theo of Golden* changed you in some way?
19. Making personal connections enhances the reading experience. Did you make connections with the story that are important and meaningful to you?
20. If you were to recommend *Theo of Golden* to a friend or fellow reader, what superlative would you use to describe the book or your reading experience?

Summary from GoodReads.com

Discussion Questions from ReadingLadies.com