

Tier 3 — Literary Discussion

Discussion Questions

For Funny You Should Ask... and Now What Are We Talking About Here? by Tim Gamble

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Tier 1 asked what happened. Tier 2 asked what kept happening. This tier asks how it was built — and what the building itself reveals.

This guide is organized in three parts: questions specific to Funny You Should Ask..., questions specific to Now What Are We Talking About Here?, and a final section on what happens when the two books are read as one project. Part Three assumes the whole group has finished both books.

A companion Facilitator Notes document ends each note with a sharper question. Save the final question in Part Three for last — ask it once, together, at the very end.

Part One — Funny You Should Ask...

1. The book is built as a series of true, self-contained stories rather than one continuous narrative, each one written in full rather than serialized. What do you think is gained by that structure — and what would be lost if it were told strictly in chronological order instead?
2. In the Epilogue, Tim tells the reader directly that he left the 1969 motorcycle trip out of this book on purpose, because it deserved a volume of its own. What does it mean that an author would announce, inside the book itself, what he chose *not* to include?
3. The “Best Job” chapter spends nearly ten thousand words building a case for Tim’s competence, ambition, and success in the furniture industry — and then answers its own title question with a volunteer job at a small community newspaper. What is the chapter actually arguing, if the real answer was never about the career at all?
4. Several chapters end on a specific image — a lumberjack statue, a shoebox, pennies in a loafer — rather than a stated lesson. What effect does that have on you as a reader, compared to a memoir that tells you directly what to take away from a story?

Part Two — Now What Are We Talking About Here?

5. The book’s entire premise is revealed only in its final chapter: Sandy asked Tim to write it so she’d never have to speak at his funeral. Every chapter before that reveal is, in retrospect, part of the very thing being assembled. How does learning the purpose of the book after reading most of it change your sense of what you’d already read?
6. The book closes with three teenage love poems, the third one bearing the same title as the *other* book — written more than fifty years before either book existed. What do you make of an author choosing to end his memoir with proof that he didn’t fully understand his own life until he was old enough to find it already written down?
7. Nearly every chapter in this book is framed as an answer to a simple question — “Have you ever been arrested,” “When did you realize you were forty.” What does the question-and-answer structure allow the book to do that a traditional chapter-by-chapter memoir couldn’t?
8. Tim writes that “you can’t get lost if you don’t know where you’re going — there’s only discovery.” Where else in the book do you see that idea at work, even in chapters that aren’t explicitly about travel or getting lost at all?

Part Three — Reading Them as One Project

9. *Funny You Should Ask...* reads, on its own, as a fast, funny, picaresque adventure. Once you've also read *Now What*, does the first book still feel like the same story — or has it quietly become something else?

10. The comparison has been made that these two books resemble a raconteur's oral storytelling voice fused with a late-life grace-testament — two traditions that don't normally appear in the same book. Does that combination match your own reading experience, or does one side of it dominate more than the other?

11. Both books are built from stories that are, by the author's own account, entirely true — nothing invented, nothing composited. Does knowing that change how you read a scene like the Colorado treehouse arrest, compared to reading the same scene as if it were fiction?

12. Taken together, do these two books ultimately argue that Tim Gamble's life was extraordinary, or that an ordinary life — witnessed closely enough — always turns out to be extraordinary? Is there a real difference between those two claims?

13. Now that you've heard how everyone else in the room read both books — the order they read them in, which lines landed, which patterns they noticed that you didn't — do you think you'd read either book again in a different light?

A book this carefully built rewards more than one reading, and a group this engaged will keep finding things a single evening can't hold. That's by design — the author's own guiding line was that you can't get lost if you don't know where you're going, because there's only discovery. Consider this guide the same way: not a conclusion, but a place to start again.

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Facilitator Notes

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A NOTE FOR THE FACILITATOR

These aren't answers — each note gives you a little more context, then ends with a sharper question you can ask word for word if the room is ready to go further.

Part One — Funny You Should Ask...

- 1. Structure over chronology.** Nothing is stated as chronology, yet certain stories clearly earn their place near each other — the “Best Job” chapter, for instance, is a single long chapter that builds across a rise, a betrayal, and a reframe before it resolves. *What do you think determines the order these stories are told in, if not time?*
- 2. Announcing what was left out.** This is one of the only moments in either book where the architecture becomes visible to the reader while they're still inside it. *Did knowing this change how you read the rest of the book — or did you notice it later, in hindsight?*
- 3. Ten thousand words to the real answer.** A shorter chapter could have made the same point in a fraction of the length. *Why do you think the author needed the reader to sit through the whole rise and fall before he was willing to give the real answer?*
- 4. Landing on an image.** This is sometimes called “showing, not telling,” but it's worth pushing past the cliché. *Can you find one moment where you're certain you understood the meaning of a chapter, even though the author never once stated it outright — and how did you know?*

Part Two — Now What Are We Talking About Here?

- 5. The reveal held to the end.** Most memoirs tell you their purpose in the first chapter. This one hides it until the last. *If you'd known from page one that this was a funeral commission, do you think you would have read the earlier chapters differently — and would that have been better or worse?*
- 6. The prophetic poem.** This is the most unusual structural choice in either book. *Does the poem feel like evidence of something real, or like the kind of thing a life arranges to look meaningful only in hindsight — and does it matter which one it is?*
- 7. The question-and-answer format.** The format mirrors an actual interview process — the weekly prompts that started the whole project. *Does knowing the book began as answers to someone else's questions change how you read the author's authority over his own story?*
- 8. “There's only discovery.”** This line began as something Tim said to a psychologist as a teenager, decades before either book existed. *Is it a philosophy he lived by from the start, or one he built afterward to explain a life he was already living another way?*

Part Three — Reading Them as One Project

9. Does the first book change? The Epilogue of *Funny* essentially promises a second book is coming. *Do you think Funny is a complete work on its own, or is it structurally incomplete without Now What — and does that change how you'd recommend it to someone who's only read one?*

10. The nearest neighbors. No single comparison fully captures either book. *If you had to name the one writer, storyteller, or voice these two books remind you of most — someone not already mentioned — who would it be, and why?*

11. The trust of true stories. A perfectly tidy memoir can read as suspicious precisely because real life isn't tidy. *Can you find a moment in either book that feels a little rough, unresolved, or oddly specific — and does that roughness make you trust the rest of the book more, not less?*

12. Extraordinary life, or ordinary life witnessed closely. This is the central claim the whole two-book project rests on. *Which answer do you believe, and what would change about these books if the other one were true instead?*

13. Closing question. Hold this until the group has talked through everything else. *Now that you've heard everyone else's reading — has your own understanding of either book actually changed, or have you simply found other people who see it the way you do?*

There is so much here left to be discovered — in the books, and in the room.

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