

Stand By Me Collaborative Discussion

For each topic below, discuss the topic with your partner(s), and compose a paragraph that fully explains your group's ideas about the topic and that illustrates your ideas with specific examples from the movie.

1) Camaraderie & Belonging – Relationships in Two “Gangs”

Stand By Me is a movie about the camaraderie of Gordie LaChance, Chris Chambers, Teddy DuChamp, and Vern Tessio, four twelve-year-old boys on the brink of growing up and taking separate paths in life. Though the movie focuses especially on the friendship between Gordie and Chris, the interactions of all four boys are significant during their journey to find Ray Brower's body. The teenagers in Ace Merrill's gang are also a significant part of the story; besides creating an additional external conflict for the boys, their presence creates a number of interesting *parallels* and *contrasts* with the four younger boys.

Focusing on the relationships and interactions that occur among the boys in both gangs, identify the most interesting similarities and differences between Chris Chambers' gang and Ace Merrill's gang. Illustrate all your ideas by referring to important moments, events, images, and lines from the movie that reveal these relationships and character traits.

- Begin with Chris Chambers and Ace Merrill, the two leaders. What are the most significant character traits of each, and what kind of a leader is each boy? Identify how specific moments, words, images, and actions from the movie that reveals each boy's important traits, priorities, and values.
- Moreover, what kind of relationships do we see between each leader and the other members of his gang, and what important traits should we notice about these relationships? How does the leader view and treat the other boys, and how do the boys view and treat one another?
- Finally, for each gang, what seems to be the boys' attraction to their gang, or the reason(s) why the boys choose to be a member? Does being in the gang give the boys positive experiences that are *beneficial* for them, or negative experiences that are *harmful* for them? If the boys are attracted to *harmful* experiences, can you explain why?
- One movie critic called Ace Merrill's gang a “corrupted” version of Gordie and Chris' gang. What might this observation mean? Is it true the members of Ace's gang are “corrupted”? What connection does this idea bear to Chris Chambers' statement “Kids lose everything unless there's someone there to look out for them”?

2) Self-Knowledge & the Hero's Journey

A hero's journey or quest is a common pattern that appears in both literature and in movies. However, this type of story is usually about more than just getting from one place to another. In his book *How to Read Literature Like A Professor*, Thomas C. Foster explains:

“The real reason for a quest never involves the stated reason. In fact, more often than not, the quester fails at the stated task. So why do they go, and why do we care? They go because of the stated task, mistakenly believing that it is their real mission. We know, however, that their quest is educational. They don't know enough about the only subject that really matters: themselves. The real reason for a quest is always self-knowledge.”

Consider why the quest to find Ray Brower's body is ultimately so significant to Gordie. In *Stand By Me*, how do Thomas Foster's observations about quests and self-knowledge apply to Gordie? In the end, what understanding, knowledge, maturity, wisdom, or strength does Gordie gain by taking this journey with his best friends? How does Gordie gain this knowledge, strength, or wisdom—through which specific experiences?