



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Farmer's Son by N.E. Lasater

*In addition to the following questions, please use any you like from the Student Study Guide. Hopefully, *Farmer's Son* will encourage reflection and sharing about your own life, pivotal choices, and family relationships.*

THE STORY.

Have you ever spent time on a farm? Did the story teach you anything you didn't know about farm life?

The novel is divided into four main sections, each with its own main point-of-view character, its own season, and its own year. Does that organization advance the story? How does each section reflect its season? How does the author solve the challenge of scenes involving other characters, which the POV character can't be a part of, yet those scenes are needed for the story?

In most novels, the hero commits on the page to the path that will change the hero's life, in a written scene. Think Frodo's decision in *The Fellowship of the Ring* to leave the Shire. In *Farmer's Son*, however, that lock-in (as it's called in screenwriting) happens off the page. Or does it?

Have you ever had a family member die unexpectedly? How did it change your family? Did any good come from it eventually?

Have you ever felt responsible for a tragedy? How have you carried that weight?

What is your most memorable scene in the book?

Which is your favorite section, and why?

What do you think is in the note Cora carries in her Bible?



If you're a parent, how would you have handled Bobby's reading challenges with his school? Do you agree that holding him back when he was younger was the right thing to do?

In a major way, this story is about mothers and sons. How would you have parented differently from Cora and Sarah? What do they get wrong and right?

At the end of "Sarah", she risks her marriage to speak her truth to Bobby. Have you ever faced a similar crossroad in your life, where you had to bet everything? How were you able to take that brave step? If it went badly, looking back, do you regret having done it?

We learn at the end of "Sarah" that Bobby's meeting in high school with his mother and Miss Nunley still haunts him. Do you too have a childhood memory that still haunts you?

Sarah is genuinely surprised when her mother tells her how Bobby has always been. Have you ever failed to see something important about a loved one that was obvious to other people? How did you finally come to see it? What did you do once you did?

Have you ever had a moment when someone's character has been fully revealed to you in a single event, as Garrett's is finally visible to Cora in the courthouse scene?

Have you ever done something that had such unimaginable consequences as Daniel's instruction to Kevin not to take down the lasso? What would be your advice to Daniel as he faces the rest of his life?

Have you ever forgiven a loved one for something nearly unforgivable? How did you arrive at that place of forgiveness?

Have you ever learned a secret that changed everything you previously knew about someone?

Are there secrets which should be kept?

Is there something in your life that you convinced yourself you had to live with when you really didn't? How did you figure that out, and what did you do then?

A story comes to life with small details. A character may bite her nails. A get-away car might have a hulu dancer stuck to the dash. After reading *Farmer's Son*, what small details stay with you?

In a story, "All Is Lost" happens at the end of the main body of action, before the buildup to the climax, when things are at their worst for the hero. It's the moment when the hero loses everything, before then rallying for the final push. In *Farmer's Son*, Bobby is the lead character, but Sarah, Garrett, Daniel and Cora are leads in their respective sections. What is each character's respective All Is Lost moment?

Many of us have met someone like Garrett, and often we don't know why they are the way they are. If we knew, would it matter? Or can we take action based on what they do to us, regardless of their internal troubles?

How would you cast the movie of *Farmer's Son*?

THE WRITING.

Some stories have a narrator you can hear. Some (like in *The Great Gatsby*) even put the narrator into the novel as a character. Other books are essentially transparent, with no narrator between the story and the reader. What kind of story is *Farmer's Son*? Does this approach work?

The writing style is third-person objective, meaning that the story is told in third person ("he" and "she" versus "I" or "you") but the characters' thoughts and inner feelings are not described, as they are in third-person omniscient, so the only way into the characters is through what they say and do, like we're watching them in a movie. Why do you think the author chose this style? Does it work for you?

Each of the four main sections is meant to contain its own complete story, with a beginning, middle and end, all while also advancing the Bobby story. Do you think that's accomplished?

In good storytelling, there is a midpoint with a key pivot in the hero's journey. What is the midpoint in *Farmer's Son*, and what does it change for the story going forward?

When researching dyslexia, the author received advice to make her story cinematic, with visually vivid scenes. Do you think she succeeded?

In storytelling, it can be rare for a climax to involve four people, each with their own plot, because there is so much to juggle. Does it work in *Farmer's Son*? Why or why not?

Stories create worlds, making them seem real to us. Does this story create its world successfully? What did the author do right/wrong?

Symbolism is sometimes deliberate by the author, but sometimes purely accidental, to be found when the reader connects dots that weren't even conscious in the author's mind. What symbolism did you find in *Farmer's Son*? (And please send your answers to the author!)

The novel is formatted for easy reading by those with reading challenges, so it looks like a YA book with its wide margins and Century Schoolhouse font from the old Dick and Jane primers. But is it a book chiefly for younger readers?