

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR
ONLY TIME WILL TELL

Book #1 in The Clifton Chronicles by Jeffrey Archer

1. At the beginning of the novel, Old Jack Tar is punishing himself for the deaths he caused by cutting himself off from the world. He is convinced that he deserves this kind of mental imprisonment for his crimes. Hugo Barrington, on the other hand, goes out of his way to justify any of his misdeeds to himself and to others. What do you think is the main difference in Old Jack Tar and Hugo Barrington's characters that causes such a different reaction to guilt and responsibility?
2. When Harry starts at St. Bede's, he is bullied by the prefect, Fisher, and openly scorned by many of the boys there, because he comes from a different social class. What do you think about this? Does where you're born determine the kind of life you can or should lead?
3. Both Hugo Barrington and Maisie Clifton are determined to get what they want out of life, yet Maisie is portrayed far more sympathetically, even when she is working as a prostitute for Eddie Atkins. What do you think is the difference between Maisie and Hugo's motivations that allows for this difference in portrayal?
4. Throughout the book, the perspective jumps around. At some point or another, nearly all of the major characters get a chance to tell their side of the story. This means that we as readers are often hearing the same events from different perspectives, already knowing what will occur in the narrator's future. How does this make you feel? Does it affect your view of events at all?
5. How did you feel about Emma and Harry's blossoming relationship, knowing that it could be incestuous? Did it make you wary of their love, or did it strengthen your investment in couple, and make you wish harder for Harry to be Arthur Clifton's son?
6. What did you think of the character of Uncle Stan? Did he strike you as a good man? Why or why not?
7. Over the course of the novel, Harry has many mentors, all for various reasons, yet all of whom are incredibly invested in his future and struck by his potential. Do you think he lives up to their hopes and expectations?
8. Leaving aside the arrest at the end of the novel, what do you think of Harry's decision to pretend to be Tom Bradshaw? What were his motivations? Were they good or bad?

9. Hugo Barrington is constantly able to thwart everyone who comes even remotely close to getting in his way, simply because he has the social and economic status to do so. What do you think this says about our systems of social and economic power?
10. What kind of comment do you think this book is making on poverty? What's the message to people seeking to lift themselves out of poverty, or to people thinking about aiding those in poverty?
11. What kind of comment do you think this novel is making on fatherhood?
12. Given the character's transformation from Old Jack Tar to Captain Tarrant, do you think it is fitting or inappropriate that he died in the old railway car?