

Pay It Forward
Discussion Guide
Grades 5-8

Before Reading: to activate schema, build background knowledge, and set a purpose.

Before using this book with your class or recommending the book to students we suggest reading the book closely to determine if it is a good fit. Consider saying to your students:

“This book contains topics and language that may be sensitive. Not all books fit all readers. If you are uncomfortable with this book, you have the right to stop reading it, but please pick another.”

- Before reading, have a class discussion to activate prior knowledge about different social and political movements. Make a list of student generated responses on an anchor chart or whiteboard. How did these movements start? How did these movements impact our world?
- Frontload vocabulary: remarkable, generosity, flushed, absence, unpredictable, flaunt, potentially, furrow, transparent, anxious, genuine, shame

During Reading: to engage students, check for understanding, and make connections.

- Why do you think Principal Morgan wanted to meet with Reuben (Mr. St. Clair) before he met with students? (Ch. 1)
- How does Reuben (Mr. St. Clair) feel about people looking at his face? Why do you think he feels that way? (Ch. 1)
- What do you think happened to Ricky (Trevor’s dad)? (Ch. 2)
- Do you think Jerry seems like a good candidate for the money? Why or why not? (Ch. 3)
- Why was Arlene (Trevor’s mom) so upset about Jerry being in and around the house? (Ch. 4)
- How were Jerry and Arlene able to connect? (Ch. 5)
- Why does Trevor want to set his mom and Reuben (Mr. St. Clair) up? (Ch. 6)
- What is the goal of Trevor’s “pay it forward” plan? (Ch. 6)
- Do you think Trevor’s “pay it forward” plan will work? Why or why not? (Ch. 6)
- How did Mrs. Greenberg choose whom to pay it forward to? (Ch. 7)
- Why is Arlene so mad at Jerry? (Ch. 8)
- Why do you think Arlene changed her mind about going out with Reuben (Mr. St. Clair)? (Ch. 9)
- How did Matt make sure he didn’t waste Mrs. Greenberg’s money? (Ch. 10)
- Which of the extra credit ideas do you think is best? Why? (Ch. 11)
- How do Reuben (Mr. St. Clair) and Arlene feel about each other? Why do they each feel conflicted about it? (Ch. 12 and Ch. 13)
- Why do you think Matt asked Sidney G not to pay it forward? Do you think that was a good decision? Why or why not? (Ch. 14)

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- What misunderstanding do Arlene and Reuben (Mr. St. Clair) have about what he was going to say at dinner? (Ch. 15)
- How does Trevor feel about his mom marrying Reuben (Mr. St. Clair)? (Ch. 16)
- Why was October 19, 1992 such an important day? (Ch. 17)
- How has Trevor's pay it forward idea grown? (Ch. 18)
- How have Arlene and Trevor's lives changed since Ricky came back? (Ch. 19)
- Why is Chris having a hard time finding the originator of the pay it forward movement? (Ch. 20)
- What idea does Trevor have for Reuben to pay it forward? (Ch. 21)
- Why does Arlene go to Reuben's house? (Ch. 22)
- How did Chris find Trevor? (Ch. 23)
- How does Trevor's life change after the news segment about his pay it forward movement? (Ch. 24 and Ch. 25)
- What was Trevor's last attempt to pay it forward? (Ch. 26 and Ch. 27)
- How did Jerry pay it forward? (Ch. 29)
- How did people react to Trevor being injured? (Ch. 30)

After Reading: to summarize, question, and reflect.

Trevor's pay it forward movement asked for folks to do three things for others. What are three kind things you could do for people in your family and/or community?

If your students enjoyed this book...

- Encourage them to continue to discuss it and refer to it in other lessons and conversations.
- Let them explore more about the topic by reading other books with similar themes, structure, characters, or content.