

Fremont Great Books Book Club

Discussion Questions for "The Adventures of Augie March" by Saul Bellow

September 19, 2026

1. The novel's prose has been described as "a child's wildest ice-cream sundae dream." Nouns and verbs are strung six or eight in a row, coupled with abundant similes and allusions. Discuss the impact of Bellow's language on character, landscape, and tempo in the novel as the reader progresses from the 1920's to the 1950s.
2. Bellow employs the technique of overlaying multiple allusions to myth and grand events and figures of history throughout the novel, particularly in his descriptions of characters. Why are the lives of average people portrayed in such grandiose terms?
3. The book's title invites comparison to another quintessentially American novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Each work features a poor boy who leaves his Midwestern home town to undertake a liberating pilgrimage. How are Augie and Huck alike in their outlook and dreams? How is Mark Twain's America different from Bellow's?
4. Augie's adventures initially resemble a picaresque novel like *Tom Jones*, in which a clever, likable rogue, after a series of misadventures, eventually comes to repent the error of his ways. Does Augie ever achieve such a repentance? What prevents him? What does Bellow's subversion of this genre suggest about his view of the human condition?
5. Is Augie an honest narrator?
6. Grandma Lausch advises Augie and Simon that respect is better than love. How do Augie and Simon respond to this philosophy? Do they reinforce it, or do they reject it?
7. When Einhorn tells Augie that he has "opposition" in him, Augie recognizes this statement as true. How is this "opposition" expressed in the novel?
8. "A man's character is his fate," says Augie, but his own character is elusive. As Robert Penn Warren wrote at the time of the novel's publication, "it is hard to give substance to a man who has no commitments." What are Augie's commitments? What defines his character?
9. How does the attempt to train the eagle Caligula to hunt lizards echo Thea's hopes for her relationship with Augie? What is the symbolic meaning of the eagle?
10. How does Augie relate to knowledge and books? Why does he never finish college? Is knowledge an end in itself for Augie, or does he put it to practical use? What is Bellow suggesting about the education provided by institutions versus the education provided by life?
11. In Augie's famous "axial lines" speech, Augie describes his vision of starting a school and living with his blind mother and his brother Georgie, along with a wife and a family of his own. Though Augie never makes this vision a reality, has he still committed to what lies at its heart? Why, among all his professions, is teaching the one that captures his imagination?
12. Kayo Obermark tells Augie that there is always bitterness in one's "chosen thing." How does Augie view this statement at the end of the novel? Why does the novel end on the note of Augie's laughter?

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SOURCES

[Penguin The Adventures of Augie March Reader's Guide](#)

[GrAdeSaver Essay Questions](#)

[Chicago Public Library One Book, One Chicago Fall 2011 Reader's Guide](#)

- [Historical, Religious and Literary References from The Adventures of Augie March](#)

[LitCharts Themes in Augie March](#)

[Court Theatre Play Adaptation Guide](#)

- Includes list of characters and more information about Saul Bellow's life as an undocumented immigrant