

Discussion Questions for *Always the Young Strangers* by Carl Sandburg
(Questions from Tuesday discussion written by Barry Swanson)

1. Who had read *Always the Young Strangers* before?
2. For those of you who had not read the book before, was it what you expected? If you had read the book, what did you re-discover that surprised you as you reflected upon Sandburg's early life?
3. Why do you think Sandburg thought it important to give us his family background in Chapter 1? What insights did you gain about him after learning about his parents?
4. How did the Krans and Holmes families influence Carl and his world-view at an early age?
5. Chapter Two (House on Berrien Street) gives us a glimpse of how Sandburg early on got a taste of politics. How do you think that early exposure impacted him and his political orientation and activism later in life?
6. What influence did "Uncle Joe" have on Carl?
7. What is the irony in the sentence, "And why were we all haunted by that Kansas farmland?"
8. Why did Carl change his name to Charles?
9. What life lessons did Charlie learn on Berrien St?
10. How would you describe Carl's father, August? His mother, Clara?
11. August did not like wasting money or time, but Clara made a "foolish" purchase that had a tremendous influence on Charlie. What was the purchase and how did it change Charlie's life as a young boy?
12. In Chapter 4 Carl tells the story of a Kansas woman who returns from Sweden and tells her friends, (my paraphrase) "I used to think my father was odd but now I know he was just Swedish." Do you think that statement reflects Carl's opinion of his father?

13. How did the railroad strike of 1888 effect Carl as a 10 year old and influence his opinion of laborers for the remainder of his life?
14. What did Charlie think of formal education?
15. Discuss some lessons that Carl learned during his formal schooling days.
16. What were some daily occurrences that Charlie observed on Berrien St. and how did those observations impact the course of his life?
17. Who were the “dirty dozen”? How did they influence Charlie?
18. In Chapter 11 Carl writes about the many trades that he learned, but what was the greatest lesson he learned while sampling various occupations?
19. What did the Prairie Town teach Carl about politics and culture?
20. What did Carl think of the College City?
21. (Bonus question) From what source did the title of Sandburg’s autobiography originate?
22. (Opinion question) Do you think that Sandburg would have described himself as a “boy heart”? What do you think that term meant to him?
23. Notes:

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1. How many of you have read Sandburg before?
2. Was *Always the Young Strangers* what you expected? Did the book alter your opinion of Sandburg?
3. Who was your favorite character? Why?
4. Did the author do a good job of recreating historic Galesburg? Were particular types of descriptions or segments more appealing than others?
5. Does anyone have a personal story connected to the events, figures, or locations mentioned in the book?
6. How would you frame *Always the Young Strangers* in relation to modern society?
7. Would you recommend this biography to a friend, especially one with no connection to Galesburg?
8. What did you think of Sandburg's poetry? Was there any poem you particularly enjoyed?
9. Is Sandburg still relevant?
10. Do you have unanswered questions? If the author were here, what would you ask him?
11. Are there any additional comments you would like to share?