

Questions for Philosophical Discussion – The Giving Tree, by Shel Silverstein

Giving and Altruism

The tree keeps on giving to the boy until it has nothing left to give. The boy on the other hand does not give anything to the tree.

1. Do you think the boy is selfish? Why or why not?
2. Is there a word for someone who keeps on giving without thinking about themselves or expecting something in return?
3. Why do you think the tree is not happy after giving the boy her trunk?

The Nature of Giving and Gifts

In the story, the tree gives the boy many gifts.

1. Have you ever given something away and later wished that you hadn't?
2. Is it easier to give something away if the receiver truly appreciates the gift?
3. When you give something to someone, do you expect something in return?
4. When you are given something, do you feel that you owe something to the person who gave you the gift?
5. Would you give something you really need to someone you love if they really need it, too?

The Nature of Love

Early in the book, we read that the tree loved the boy.

1. Why do you think the tree loved the boy in the beginning?

2. Why do you think the boy loved the tree?
3. Are the two “loves” the same type of love?
4. Do people need to have a reason to love someone?
5. Do you treat people that you love differently from the ones that you don't?
6. When you love someone, how do you show him or her that you love them?
7. Have you ever been angry with someone you love because they went away for a while or because they did something you did not like?
8. Can you be angry with someone and love them at the same time?

Happiness

The tree is not really happy after giving the boy her trunk.

1. Is the boy happy at the end of the story?
2. Is the tree happy?
3. If you were the tree would you be happy? Why?
4. Have you ever done something just to make someone happy?
5. Does doing things to make others happy make you happy?
6. Do you need others in order to be happy?
7. Do you need a reason to be happy, or can you be happy for no reason at all?
8. Can you be happy and sad at the same time?

[Original questions and guidelines for philosophical discussion](#) by Thomas Wartenberg. Revised by Jayme Johnson. Edited June 2020 by The Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics.