***Hidden Talents* Discussion Questions**

**“Off the Bus and into Trouble”**

1. How does Martin describe Edgeview? What can of place is it? How does Martin’s description of the school reveal his feelings about it?
2. Why is Martin rude to Principal Davis and the bus driver?
3. How does Principal Davis respond when Martin says, “I’m here because you need an assistant. The place is too much for you to handle by yourself. You just are up to the up to the job” (6)? How did Principal Davis respond to Martin’s earlier wise cracks? What might explain the different responses?
4. What can you tell about Martin’s parents? What kind of relationship does Martin seem to have with them?

**“Flaming Out”**

1. Remember that a man puts out the fire with an extinguisher. What does the man’s response to the fire and his appearance suggest about what kind of person he is?
2. What kind of person would you say Torchie is? What are his character traits? What evidence can you find to support your opinion?
3. Remember that Martin tells Torchie why he’s at Edgeview:

I held up my hand to shut him off. “I’m here because I seem to have a bit of a problem respecting authority. That’s how they put it. Well, that’s how the polite ones put it. I’ve also been called a major pain in the butt, a disturbing influence, a smart mouth, and a snotty-nosed little puke, among other thing.” I didn’t bother adding some of Dad’s more colorful phrases. There was no point tell this fire freak my life’s story. Not that he’d care. 12

1. What do you make of this quote? What does it reveal about Martin?

**“Taking the Tour” and “Teaching Without a License”**

1. What are some of the nicknames students have at Edgeview? Are the nicknames fitting?
2. How is Bloodbath’s appearance ironic?
3. Read the note added to Bloodbath’s permanent file. What does this note tell you about how the teachers see Bloodbath? Why is their view of Bloodbath so different from reality?
4. On page 24, there is a letter from Martin’s mom. What does the fact that the letter is crumpled and in the wastebasket suggest about Martin’s mom?

**“What’s Short and Smart and Fun to Tease?”**

1. How would you describe Cheater? What are his character traits?
2. During his discussion with Cheater, Martin wonders, “if someone hated you, did it really matter why?” (27) What do you think?
3. Now that you’re several chapters into the book, how would you describe Martin? What are his character traits? What are his conflicts? What do you think motivates him to mouth off so much?
4. What happened to Torchie’s parrot? ☺ What do the edges of the letter suggest?

**“Break Time”**

1. Describe Trash. What is he like?
2. As the boys are talking about Trash, Lucky gets upset that they are calling Trash crazy. He says, “If enough people call you crazy, maybe you begin to believe it, even if you aren’t.” (33) Is Lucky right? Does this happen? Why or why not?
3. Describe how Martin is feeling about himself and about Edgeview at the end of the chapter.

**“A Little Class,” through “Going Nowhere”**

1. These chapters introduce all the teachers: Mr. Parsons, Miss Nomad, Ms. Crenshaw, Mr. Acropolis, Mr. Briggs and Mr. Langhorn. As a group, rank these teachers from best to worst. Give reasons for their ranking.
2. How does Martin behave in each of his classes? How does he upset his teachers?
3. What motivates Martin to behave rudely in his classes? What, if anything, did the teachers do to provoke Martin? Did they deserve his comments?
4. Why didn’t Martin behave badly in gym?
5. Why does Martin consider Flinch an artist?
6. What do you make of Lucky’s odd behavior in Mrs. Crenshaw’s class?
7. What does the letter on page 66 reveal about Mr. Briggs? What does this suggest about everything else Martin said to his teachers?

**“Torchie Flicks Away”**

1. Why doesn’t Martin get angry when he knows that Torchie, Cheater and Lucky have a secret about Friday nights?
2. What can you tell about Lucky’s character traits when he says, “I look out for my friends. Understand? Torchie—he’s my friend. Same with Cheater and Flinch. You treat them okay, we’ll get along”? (68)
3. When Lucky brings in a stereo, why does he say, “It’s mine…I didn’t steal it. I got it last Christmas”? (70)
4. Why don’t the others hang out with Trash?
5. What do you think Martin is talking about when he picks up the book of science fiction stories and thinks, “Maybe it was the book that gave me my first real hint”? (71) What hint?
6. Martin reflects that he doesn’t think it fair to compare him to “kids who set fires or stole or threw stuff or cheated all the time” (71). What do you think? Does Martin belong at Edgeview? Why or why not?
7. What can you tell about Martin relationship with his family from the end of the chapter and Teri’s letter on page 73?

**“Settling In”**

1. Why do you think Martin says he likes to write “[e]xcept when we had to do stuff about ourselves”? (77)
2. Why does Martin compare Edgeview to a picture of grinning skull on page 78?
3. Why do Torchie, Cheater, Flinch and Lucky finally decide to tell Martin what they do on Friday nights and include him?

**“Way Out”**

1. How do the Edgies see the Alters? Why?
2. “A Glimmer of the Truth”
3. What do you think Martin is noticing about Flinch in the arcade?
4. Why does Lucky seem to get tense when Martin is reluctant to take something from his stash? Why does he relax once Martin takes something?
5. Go look up the words *clairvoyance, telepathy* and *telekinesis* unless you already know what they mean. Why do you think Martin is looking up these words?

**“Milking the Moment”**

1. Foreshadowing is when an author drops clues in a book that hint at what is going to happen next. For example, when Martin is reading the science fiction book, he says, “Maybe it was the book that gave me my first real hint” (71). Why is this foreshadowing? What other examples of foreshadowing can you find in pages 71-97?
2. Why do you think David Lubar uses foreshadowing instead of just having Martin tells us what he’s beginning to notice about his friends? Do you like his use of foreshadowing? Why or why not?
3. Why does Martin expect his friends to be excited and happy when he tells them he discovered they have psychic powers? Why don’t they react they way Martin expected? Why do they get angry?
4. After Martin insults Torchie, he says, “What was wrong with me? I couldn’t even fit in with the freaks and misfits.” (100) What ***is*** wrong with Martin? Why can’t he fit in? Why does he even lash out at people who are nice to him like Torchie and Mr. Briggs?

**“If I Toll You Once”**

1. What does Martin mean when he says, “*I don’t care, either*, I told myself as I went to sleep. Right. Unlike Bloodbath, I didn’t believe my lies”? (104)
2. What conflict does the memo on the bottom of page 104 reveal?
3. “Now You See Me, Now You Don’t”
4. How does the memo on page 109 foreshadow what the “special program” for Martin is?

**“Current Methods” through “What’s on Your Mind?”**

1. Do you think Principal Davis’s “special program” will work on Martin? Why or why not?
2. What is Martin’s motivation for befriending Trash?
3. What’s Cheater’s motivation for suggesting that the science class run an experiment on mind reading?
4. Why does Martin finally try to make up with Torchie and his friends? Why is he willing to drop the topic of psychic powers?
5. Martin poses a question: “Did I want to be right, or did I want to have friends?”(120) Which is more important? Being right or having friends?

**“Pick a Card, Any Card” and “Testing, Testing”**

1. What do you think of Martin’s decision to sit with his friends again and not sit with Trash?
2. Look carefully at the test results on page 132. Did the test really prove no one is psychic?
3. Why does Cheater look he is “about to cry” when Martin proves he really is psychic? What is he afraid of? (He has more than one fear so read closely!)
4. How does Cheater’s psychic ability explain why he wound up at Edgeview? How do Torchie’s, Flinch’s and Lucky’s psychic powers also explain why they’re at Edgeview?
5. Why did Martin want so badly in the first place to prove his friends had psychic powers? How does he feel now that he has finally gotten them to accept the truth?
6. What motivates Martin to go to Trash’s room at the end of the chapter?
7. What do you make of the fact that the letter from Dorothy Anderson on page 139 is unfinished?

**“Now What?” through “A Declaration of War”**

1. At the end of the chapter “Now What,” Torchie, Lucky, Cheater, Flinch and Trash looked at Martin as if he “had all the answers in the world” (145) Why do they assume Martin’s the one who can help? Considering Martin’s behavior throughout the book and in the current chapters, are they right to trust him and look to him for help? Does Martin have any traits that make him the right person to help them?
2. Before the fight with the Edgies, Martin says, “Act like a criminal and people will treat you like one.” (159) What does this mean? Is it true? How does Martin use this to his advantage in the fight with the Edgies?
3. How does the fight with the Edgies change the way the Martin and his friends see themselves and thus how they feel about themselves?
4. How have Martin and his friends been acting like a team in the past few chapters? (I can think of at least three examples of team work) What is enabling them to act like a team now when they couldn’t before?

**“Politics”**

1. How did the fight with the Edgies have unintended consequences for the school?
2. When Martin finds out that there’s a chance Edgeview might be closed if the school fails inspection, why does he convince his friends they have to help the school pass inspection and stay open? What is motivating them to fight for Edgeview instead of against it?
3. What does the “Why I Like Being Me” essay on page 173, reveal about Trash? Why would he suddenly feel like writing this essay?

**“Lost and Found”**

1. How has Martin changed since the beginning of the book? How do his actions in this chapter prove he’s different now? What other evidence can you find throughout the book that Martin has changed?
2. How do Lucky’s actions in this chapter reveal that he’s also starting to change?

**“Blow Up”**

1. Yes, this chapter is one giant fart joke.

**“Espionage” (Spying) through “Confrontation”**

1. Cheater worries that it’s wrong to use his talent to read Bloodbath’s mind. What do you think? Is it ok to read Bloodbath’s mind or is it wrong?
2. In what way are teachers at Edgeview are just like the students?
3. What other evidence can you find in the past few chapters that Cheater, Torchie, Trash and Martin are changing?

**“Talent” through “Meeting”**

1. What does Lucky sacrifice to help Martin realize that he has a talent? What would motivate him to make such a sacrifice for Martin?
2. Why does Martin say having a talent “was wonderful and terrible at the same time”? (203) How is his talent both wonderful and terrible?
3. On his way to meet with the inspectors, Martin wonders if he should use his talent to make them like him. He says, “Was it okay for me to use this power to get what I wanted?” (203). Is it okay to use his power this way? What does Martin ultimately decide? Why?

**“Showdown” through “Epilogue”**

1. What does Martin’s “showdown” with Bloodbath help him realize about his relationship with his father?
2. Why does Martin decide he wants to go home instead of stay at Edgeview with his friends? What does his decision reveal about what kind of a person he is?
3. At the end of the book, Martin says, “The last thing I want is to be a bully” (213). How can his talent make him a bully?
4. At the end of the book, Martin says, “The last thing I want is to be a bully” (213). How can his talent make him a bully? Ultimately, how similar is Martin to Bloodbath? What ultimately separates them?
5. Why is Edgeview a particularly appropriate name for the school to which Martin is sent? How might the name be interpreted in the context of the story?