***Touching Spirit Bear* Discussion Questions**

**Ch. 1**

1. Why did the author begin the book with Cole already heading towards the island instead of beginning with the events that sent Cole to the island?
2. Where in ch. 1 does the author use a flashback? Is this a more or less effective way to tell the story?
3. Why does Cole blame his parents for his current situation? Do they deserve the blame? Why or why not?
4. How does Circle Justice work?

**Ch. 2**

1. What motivates Cole to choose Circle Justice instead of jail?
2. What motivates Garvey to give Cole the at.óow? Do you think this was a good idea? Why or why not?
3. Garvey says to Cole, “I thought you liked being in control.” (15) What evidence can you find that Garvey is right and Cole likes to be in control? Why do you think being in control is so important to Cole?
4. What motivates Cole to burn down his shelter?
5. What kind of a person is Cole? What evidence can you find to support your answer?

**Ch. 3**

1. What lesson is Garvey trying to teach Cole when he asks Cole to eat all the raw cake ingredients?
2. What are Cole’s parents like?
3. How responsible are Cole’s parents for his situation?
4. What do you think is the source of Cole’s anger?
5. What events and character traits caused Cole to wind up on the island?
6. Why does Garvey say to Cole, “Until Peter forgives you, he won’t heal”? (33)

**CH. 4 -5**

1. Ben Mikaelsen describes a lot of characters’ appearances in this chapter—what they’re wearing, their hair and skin and their facical expressions. What does each character’s appearance reveal about him or her? Consider especially Cole’s mother, Judge Tanner, the Keeper, Peter and Nathanial Blackwood.
2. What evidence can you find that during the Circle meeting Cole isn’t really sorry for what he did to Peter?
3. Why does it scare Cole to be alone with himself?
4. Why does Cole want to teach the spirit bear to be afraid of him? Why does he want everyone and everything to be afraid of him?
5. On page 45, Cole thinks, “This was all somebody else’s fault.” Why does he always blame other people?

**Ch. 6-7**

1. So far the story has been using a lot of flashbacks, alternating between present day on the island and the Circle Justice meetings in the past. How does the author make it clear when he is using a flashback? Are these flashbacks an effective way to tell the story?
2. Why does Garvey believe that banishment to an island will help Cole?
3. What are the effects of Cole’s anger so far?
4. What motivates Cole to attack the Spirit Bear?

**CH. 8 -12**

1. Why does keeping a piece of the Spirit Bear’s fur make Cole feel powerful?
2. At the beginning of ch. 9 Cole is irritated by a nest of baby birds, so why at the end of the chapter does he call out to them, “Are you okay?” (79)
3. Why does Cole decide he envy the sparrows?
4. What motivates Cole to choose to live instead of die?
5. What emotional effect does the mauling have on Cole? (We already know the physical effect—he’s badly injured!)
6. How does the Spirit Bear make Cole feel trusted? Why does Cole say that he “had trusted and been trusted” and “that was enough”? (97)
7. What lessons did getting mauled help Cole to understand? Is there any evidence he’s changing?
8. Why did it take a mauling to get Cole to start changing? Would anything else have been able to affect him so profoundly?

**Ch. 13-14**

1. What does Garvey mean when he says, “A person is never done being mad. Anger is memory never forgotten”? (110)
2. When Garvey doesn’t believe Cole saw a Spirit Bear, why doesn’t Cole show Garvey the fur he has from the Spirit Bear? Why does he throw the hair in the water?
3. What evidence can you find in ch. 13 that Cole has changed?
4. How has Cole’s mother started to change? What motivated her to change?
5. Why does Cole want to see the Spirit Bear again?
6. Remember that in ch. 14 Cole’s mother begs for his forgiveness. Do you think Cole should forgive her? Why or why not?
7. Does Cole deserve a second chance on the island?

**Ch. 15-16**

1. When Garvey pushes Cole at the Circle Justice meeting, what point is he trying to make about how people change?
2. What evidence is there that Cole hasn’t completely changed and gotten rid of all his anger?
3. How is the world like a hot dog according to Garvey? What lesson is he trying to teach Cole with the hot dog?

**Ch. 17-18**

1. What lesson does Edwin try to teach Cole with the stick?
2. Why does Edwin make Cole soak in a freezing cold pond?
3. Is it fair that Garvey and Edwin are making Cole build his own shelter when he has a bad arm? Why or why not?
4. Why does Edwin say, “Pride has no place on this island”? (149) What does he mean?
5. Why do Garvey and Edwin have Cole dance like a whale?
6. Why does Edwin make Cole carry a rock up a hill and then push it back down?

**Ch. 19-21**

1. In ch. 19 what makes Edwin and Garvey tell Cole they’re tearing the shelter down and heading back to Minneapolis?
2. How does Cole change Edwin’s and Garvey’s minds about leaving the island?
3. Why is Cole still afraid of being alone?
4. How significant is it that the spark plug has been back in the boat for two days?
5. Why does Cole hack up the huge log he finds? What does this suggest about what kind of person he is now?

**Ch. 22-24**

1. How does Cole learned to be invisible and get the Spirit Bear to come to him?
2. Why does Cole say, “I forgive you” at the end of his anger dance? (194) Who is he forgiving?
3. In ch. 24 , Cole thinks to himself, “Nobody ever woke up in the morning and chose to be angry. That meant that if he remained angry something outside him controlled him.” (195) What does this mean? Is it true?
4. What does Cole learn from his anger dance?
5. Why does Peter try to commit suicide?
6. Why does Cole think it will help Peter to come to island? Do you agree?

**Ch. 25-27**

1. When Edwin returns to the island to talk about Peter, Cole says, “But it won’t ever be enough, will it? I can’t ever change what I did to Peter! And I can’t ever change how you think about me.” (207) What is “it”? At what point will Cole have done “enough”?
2. How does Peter respond to Cole when he first comes to the island? How does he treat Cole? Is his response justified? (In other words, is it ok for Peter to behave this way?)
3. What is Peter’s internal conflict?

**Ch. 28**

1. What motivated Peter to attack Cole at the pond? Why does he suddenly stop hitting Cole and start crying instead?
2. What does the Spirit Bear appear to them as Cole is hugging Peter?
3. Why was Peter able to finally forgive Cole?
4. Why does Ben Mikaelsen end the book with the two boys carving a circle? Do you think this makes a good ending for the book?