

MAX & LAX

BOOK ONE

Discussion & Activity Guide

For book clubs, homeschool groups, classrooms, and families
Ages 10–14 · 29 chapters · by D.J. Dawson

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A NOTE TO DISCUSSION LEADERS

Hi — D.J. here. I wrote *Max & Lax* for my own five kids: a fast, funny, clean adventure with real heart underneath the jokes. This guide is for whoever’s lucky enough to be reading it with kids — a parent at the dinner table, a co-op leader, a teacher, a librarian.

Two ground rules that make every question below work better:

1. **There are no wrong answers.** The best question in this guide is “what did you think of that?” — everything else is just that question wearing different costumes.
2. **Let the funny parts be funny.** This book hides its heart inside its jokes on purpose. If a conversation starts with laughing at Bob and ends somewhere real, that’s the book working exactly as designed.

Spoiler map: the questions are grouped into four reading sections. Each group is safe to read *after* finishing its chapters — but Part 4’s questions reveal the ending, so leaders reading ahead, beware.

PART 1 • CHAPTERS 1-7 – “UH, WHO AM I?”

1. Max wakes up with no name, no memory, and no past. What do you think would be the scariest part of that? What’s the first thing Max does or says that tells you who he is *anyway* — even without his memories?
2. Nurse Pat teaches Max “the nod” — a secret signal that means *get me out of this conversation*. Why do small kindnesses matter so much when everything else is scary? Who is the “Pat” in your life?
3. Even frightened and lost, Max jokes: “*Apparently, I’m full of surprises today.*” Why do people use humor in scary moments? When have you?
4. At first, nobody else can see the guy in the superhero suit. What evidence does the book give you that Lax is real — or imaginary? When did you decide?
5. The reader learns things Max doesn’t know — like what certain people plan to do with whatever survived the warehouse fire. How does knowing more than the hero change the way you read?

PART 2 • CHAPTERS 8-17 – TWO MINDS, ONE BODY

1. Max and Lax share one body but want different things — one wants a nap and a low profile, the other wants adventure. When do *you* have to share space, time, or decisions with someone who wants different things? What makes it work?
2. In the church, Rachel's music reaches something in Max that his memory lost. Why do songs carry feelings even when we can't explain them? Is there music that "remembers" something for you?
3. Lax kept a hard truth from Max because, as he admits, *"I didn't want to lose you."* Was that wrong? What's the difference between protecting someone and deceiving them?
4. Lax tells Max: *"You're kind of... home... now."* What makes a person feel like home? Who is that for you?
5. Max makes a huge choice about his future — and his reason is that he doesn't want to hurt Lax. What does it tell you about someone when their biggest worry is for their friend?
6. Lax can't hug Max — so he sends him the *feeling* of a hug instead. How do you comfort someone when you can't fix their problem?

PART 3 • CHAPTERS 18-24 – THE CHASE

1. When escape becomes impossible, Rachel tells Max to run and come back for her later. Was she right? Can running away ever be the brave choice?
2. Max bluffs his way through the field office as "Bob," explaining a shelf accident with one word: *"Ignorance."* Why is a terrible plan performed with confidence so funny? When did one of your plans go sideways?
3. When Lax finally gets to be "the one on the outside," he calls a broom closet *"the best room I've ever been in."* Why does something ordinary mean so much to him? What ordinary thing would you miss most?
4. Agent Colby changes her mind about Max — not because he's powerful, but because of how he treats people. What actually earns trust? Who has earned yours?
5. Two agents face the same temptations in this book and choose differently. What do you think makes the difference between a Colby and a Vickers?

PART 4 • CHAPTERS 25-29 – "CONTROL CAN'T BEAT LOVE" (ENDING SPOILERS!)

1. Dickinson insists Lax only *"simulates life. Convincingly."* Is he right? How does the book answer him? What do *you* think makes someone a *someone*?
2. Monger grabs power that was never his — and it nearly destroys everything, including him. Lax says the difference is that *"control can't beat love."* What does that mean in the story's final battle? Where else in the book is it true?
3. Max never kills anyone — not even the people who hurt him most. Earlier he says, *"We're not killers, Rach."* Is mercy a weakness or a strength? What does it cost Max? What does it win him?
4. Max's memory starts coming back through the people he loves — not from trying harder to remember. Why do you think the author made memory work that way?
5. Lax was made in a lab, has no family, and spent his whole life unseen — and by the end he has a home, a best friend, and a job. What actually changed for him? Did Max "fix" Lax, or did they fix each other?
6. The very last page shows a stranger watching them. Make your prediction: who is he, and what happens in Book Two?

BIG-PICTURE QUESTIONS (WHOLE BOOK)

1. Max tells Rachel, *"He made me interesting."* She disagrees — the courage was Max's all along. Who's right? Do the people who love us *make* us better, or *reveal* what was there?

2. The book is full of promises kept: a fist-bump saved for the right moment, a rescue that was promised in an SUV, “the nod.” Why do kept promises matter so much in this story — and in real life?
3. If you could have Max’s powers but had to share your head with a wisecracking roommate forever... would you take the deal?

ACTIVITIES

1. **Design your suit.** Lax’s blue suit has a lightning bolt; Max’s is black with a utility belt. Design your own — what symbol goes on the chest, and why?
2. **Write the inside view.** Pick any scene and rewrite a page of it from Lax’s point of view — what does the passenger see that the driver misses?
3. **Aggressively gentle.** Max tells Lax he “basically invented *aggressively gentle*” — together they win every fight without seriously hurting anyone. List five conflicts (real or invented) and brainstorm an aggressively gentle solution for each.
4. **The sound of memory.** At a piano, Max’s hands remember the chords of Debussy’s *Clair de lune* before the rest of him remembers anything at all. Listen to it together. Then write a few sentences about a piece of music that “remembers” something for you.
5. **Bob-mode improv.** One player must explain something ridiculous (why the fridge is full of socks) with total confidence while the group asks follow-up questions. Straight faces required. “Sheer ignorance” is a legal answer.
6. **Make the pact.** Max and Lax seal their biggest moments with a fist-bump that waits the whole book to land. Invent a family or club handshake — and decide together what it means.

About the author & the Clean Pledge

D.J. Dawson is a software engineer and a dad of five who writes the books he wanted to hand his own kids: no profanity, no sexual content — real stakes, real danger, real courage. That promise is called the **Clean Pledge**, and it applies to every Dauntless Books title.

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