

***How to Change Your Mind* by Michael Pollan**

Discussion questions adapted from www.litlovers.com

1. Why are so many of us intent on escaping our own consciousness? Consider Author Michael Pollan's statement that "if everyday waking consciousness [is] but one of several possible ways to construct the world, then perhaps there is value in cultivating a great amount of... neural diversity." What does Pollan mean—how does consciousness shape our views of the world around us? And what is neural diversity?
2. *Follow-up to Question 1:* Pollan writes that children approach reality with the wide-eyed "astonishment of an adult on psychedelics." Is he serious? What is he referring to?
3. Other than LSD or mushrooms, Pollan says we can also achieve neural diversity through meditation and prayer. Have you ever had a transcendent experience through either of those means?
4. After psychoactive drugs leave the body and users come off the trip, what kinds of residual effects do many users continue to experience?
5. What did you think about using psychoactive drugs prior to reading this book? Did this book change your stance on others using psychoactive drugs? Do you have an interest in trying them yourself now that you've read Pollan's book?
6. Prior to reading Pollan's account, what were your views on Timothy Leary and the 60s "turn on, tune in, drop out" culture. If you are, say, in your sixties or older, did you consider Leary a boundary-breaking hero ... a self-promoter ... a dangerous pied piper ... a self-indulgent egotist ... a daring experimenter?
7. How did Leary derail scientific study of LSD? Would it be fair to say that had Leary's counter-culture not turned LSD into a bad word, we might already be benefiting—right now—from the drug's ability to offer relief from suffering? Or is that leveling unfair blame at Leary?
8. In terms of LSD's medicinal benefits, what have scientists discovered? What do they see as the drug's potential?
9. Talk about how psychoactive drugs work in the brain. Are you able to grasp Pollan's explanations; is the writing lucid enough to cut through the scientific technicalities? Or were you stumped?
10. The author used himself as a guinea pig. How did he experience the drugs?
11. Your opinion: LSD—good thing ... or bad thing?