

***We Begin at the End* by Chris Whitaker**

Discussion questions from Macmillan Publishers

1. What do you make of the portrayal of each gender in this book? Are men or women worse in this novel, or might they be equally good or bad?
2. Star tells her daughter, “Selfless acts, Duchess. They’re what make you a good person.” (chapter 5, p. 42), yet she seems to be entirely selfish in many of her actions. Why do you think this is? Do you agree with Star? What makes a good person good?
3. Hal asks Duchess, “If the good stand by idle, are they still good?” (chapter 25, p. 204). What do you think? Are there any ostensibly good characters in this novel who lose their goodness by standing by?
4. Star says to Walk: “You’re like a kid. Better and worse. Bad and good. None of us are any one thing. We’re just a collection of the best and worst things we’ve done.” (chapter 8, p. 67). Later, Duchess talks about Dolly’s abusive father to Hal: “Some people are all dark.” (chapter 25, p. 203). But Hal, thinking about Sissy, tells Duchess, “But with children...there is no bad.” (chapter 25, p. 206). Are any of the characters in this novel morally pure in either direction?
5. Star believes “the universe finds a way to balance the good and the bad” (chapter 8, p. 67). Thinking about the story, do you agree with her?
6. Is Duchess right to tell Robin several times that he doesn’t ever need to apologize to her? Why does she tell him that?
7. At school, Duchess learns that the triangle is the strongest shape (chapter 23, p. 189). How is this fact reflected in her life? What’s the strongest trio of characters in this novel?
8. “It was cold, no matter how he felt, it was a cold and cruel thing to do. When she saw him she remembered the darkest part of her life, and she always would.” (chapter 27, p. 221). Is Walk selfish to try to come back into Martha’s life?
9. Duchess tells Walk, “Ours is a small story, Chief Walker. Sad enough, but small. Let’s not pretend different.” (chapter 28, p. 233). Why do you think Duchess says this? Why does she revert to calling him “Chief Walker”?
10. Duchess derides Thomas Noble, telling him: “You sound like a child. The notion of fair.” (chapter 40, p. 311). Why do you think he believes in fairness and Duchess does not? Is the world of this novel fair?
11. Why do you think Duchess leaves Robin with Peter and Lucy? Did she do the right thing in letting him stay with the Laytons rather than reclaiming him (chapter 48, p. 366)? Is this her truly selfless act?
12. Is Darke a good person? Why do you think he gives the gun back to Vincent?
13. Do you think each character gets the ending they deserve?
14. Why do you think the author named this book what he did? Do you think the title fits the book? Why or why not?