

# Smart on the Inside

## Discussion Questions

### Introduction

### The Turning Point: 1994

1. Jason says that he has a learning disability? What is a definition of a learning disability?
2. Do you know people who have learning disabilities? How do their disabilities affect them? What are their strengths?
3. Why do you think that Eileen kept her learning disability a secret for so many years?

### Chapter 1 Struggling to Learn

1. Have you had students in your classes who had difficulty reading? How did teachers help students who had reading difficulties?
2. How would it feel if reading was as difficult for you as it was for Eileen?
3. Many of Eileen's classmates bullied her. What can be done to stop bullying?
4. When Elliot and Eileen were working with their father, they were hiding the spelling words under the table. Were they cheating? Were they wrong to do that?
4. Are there skills that your sibling can do that you can't do as well? How does this make you feel?

### Chapter 2 Losing Hope

1. Eileen was told that she would "never amount to anything"? What does that mean? Was that prediction correct?
2. Eileen calls Elliot her "guardian angel". What did he do that helped her?
3. Eileen was kicked off the cheerleading team due to her grades. Was that fair? Do athletes and cheerleaders need to maintain good grades to stay on the teams in your school?
4. Imagine how Eileen felt as she left the locker room. If you were her friend, what would you say or do to make her feel better?

### **Chapter 3 Realizing Talents**

1. Describe Eileen's talents. Describe her personality traits.
2. On a sheet of paper, write down your talents or strengths. Write down the personality traits that will help you succeed. (risk-taker, persistent...)
3. What things made high school a positive experience for her?
4. How do people gain confidence in themselves? Why is self-confidence or self-esteem important?

### **Chapter 4 Developing Job Skills**

1. Who helps you with your homework? What strategies help you when you are studying for a test?
2. The manager said that Eileen interacted well with the customers. If you were a restaurant manager, what would you tell your employees that they needed to do when they were working with a customer?
3. Why was Eileen upset about the promotion to work at the cash register? What did she need to do before she could start this new position?

### **Chapter 5 Gaining Self-Confidence**

1. Describe how Eileen felt when she heard the test results.
2. How would her life have been different if she had found out that she had learning disabilities when she was still in school?
3. Who are some of the famous people who have learning disabilities? What does their success teach you about learning disabilities?

### **Chapter 6 Buying My Own McDonald's Restaurant**

1. What are some of the things that Eileen did in this chapter that show that she had gained confidence in herself?
2. How did Mr. Stone help her? Why did he do this for her?
3. What did Eileen do that made her an outstanding owner/operator of a McDonald's restaurant?

## **Chapter 7     Revealing My Secret**

1. Why was Eileen so involved in helping others in the community? What does this tell you about her personality?
2. What types of things did she do to help people in the community?
2. How did people react to the newspaper article? How did their reaction make her feel?

## **Chapter 8     Helping Others Understand**

1. What accommodations are given to students with special needs in your classroom?
2. How did the students and adults react to Eileen as she talked about her learning disability for the first time in public?
3. Her speech at Jason's school was a turning point in her life? How did her life change after that speech?
4. Bulletin boards at her restaurant are being used to teach customers about people with learning differences. What misunderstandings do people have about students with special needs? What should the public know about people with learning issues?

## **Chapter 9     Honesty Leads to Inspiration**

1. How did Jason change Eileen's life? How did Eileen help Jason and his classmates?
2. What has this true story taught you about learning disabilities?
3. Why was Eileen able to succeed in spite of her learning disabilities?

## **Epilogue**

1. Why was it difficult to convince Eileen to get tested?
2. What did the test results show?
3. How will Eileen's life change after her reading and writing skills improve?
4. How did Eileen change Kathy's life? How did Kathy change Eileen's life?