

Roland West, Outcast

Discussion Questions

1. Roland is so shy that he freezes up in speech class. Later, his brother Jarret tells him, “Find your voice. You might have something to say one day. And you wanna be able to say it.” Have you ever had to give a talk in front of a group? How did you feel about it? We can’t control how another feels about talking to a group, but how can we help others feel comfortable talking to us?
2. In order to combat bullying, River Run High has a diversity club, Empowerment. Considering the recent vandalism, they develop a mandatory sensitivity program as well. Many schools and workplaces now have diversity groups and/or sensitivity programs. The goal is to promote inclusion and respect of others regardless of differences. How can such a group benefit a school or workplace? How can such a group go astray?
3. The Catholic youth group, the Fire Starters, helps clean up the damage to Brice’s house and yard even though they weren’t responsible for it. In doing this, they show compassion for Brice as a fellow classmate and person. How can we support others without affirming all of their choices?
4. Empowerment, the diversity club in this story, claims to support students regardless of differences and to look for ways to build relationships, but their attitude toward Roland shows they don’t support diversity of opinion. He is immediately judged and labeled because he is “straight, white, and privileged” and because he is a Catholic. Have you experienced a person or group who claims to be openminded but who isn’t open to moral truth? What labels are given to those who stand by moral truth? How do these labels silence people?
5. We read in the Scriptures “Judge not, lest you be judged” (Matt 7:1). Does that mean we should never tell another that what they are doing is wrong? What is the difference between judging another and judging their actions? See paragraph 1861 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
6. Brice Maddock is not attracted to boys. She grew up with no father and a weak mother, who had been repeatedly hurt by men. Brice doesn’t want to be like her mother, and she has a negative view of men. How can the tragedies of childhood affect a person’s outlook as an adult? Can a person change?

7. In Chapter 26, Brice asks Peter what the church teaches about love. Peter doesn't want to come across as judgmental, but he also doesn't want to lie, so he says a little prayer and explains Catholic teaching about love and marriage. See paragraphs 2357 and 2358 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The teachings of the Catholic Church are not a matter of opinion, but a matter of truth passed down to us from Jesus Christ. Embracing truth is what saves a person. Why is it sometimes difficult to speak the truth? Are you willing to risk losing a friendship in order to lead someone to the truth? If we choose to remain silent or to support a friend who is living contrary to Church teaching, how are we hurting rather than helping them?
8. Toward the end of the story, Roland pushes past his reluctance to speak in front of the Empowerment kids and to speak on hard truths. He doesn't want to be like Saint Peter, when he denied Jesus, or Pilate, who chose to wash his hands of choosing sides. The saints were willing to die for the faith and to speak the truth despite persecution. Prepared by his study of the saints, Roland defends his faith and then challenges the group to stop trying to silence those who don't agree with them. What can you do to prepare for your next opportunity? How important is it that we learn how to explain and defend our faith? Can role playing or mock trials be an effective tool?
9. Roland challenges the kids from the diversity group to listen to him even though they disagree, and he seems to reach many of them. How can open discussions help us to gain empathy and help each other? What communication techniques can we use that can help others be more receptive to our message? Consider variables like the forum, tone of voice, time spent speaking versus listening, the use of labels, mannerisms, etc.