

Study Questions

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&

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To Accompany
look me in the eye
my life with asperger's
by John Elder Robison

Instructions to Study Questions

This study guide is designed for students who want to understand and teach individuals with Asperger's Syndrome. Answering the questions in this guide will provide students an opportunity to master the material presented in this book through active participation. To complete the study guide, first read the chapter thoroughly, and then answer the study questions. After doing this, check your answers against the material in the text.¹

Prologue

Pages 1-3

The author discusses the fact that he did not look at people in the eye. People in his environment interpreted the meaning of this behavior in negative ways.

List three of the negative attributions that were discussed.

Describe the reason the author gives for his behavior.

What does this mismatch between peoples perceptions and the authors experience tell you about "jumping to conclusions" about the cause of peoples behavior?

Page 3

The Austrian psychiatrist Hans Asperger wrote about children who were _____, with above average _____, but who exhibited a number of behaviors common to people with _____, such as _____.

Asperger's syndrome was added to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in _____.

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Page 3-4

Before the condition was identified, what types of diagnoses did these children often end up with?

Page 4

Describe some of the 'rare gifts' that can come with Asperger's syndrome.

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What does the author mean when he says "Asperger's exists along a continuum"?

True or false: Asperger's can develop later in life.

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Page 4-5

Autism is a behavioral diagnosis, with a triad of central deficits in social reciprocity and interaction; communication; and repetitive behavior. Relate the author's description of his own behavior to this triad of deficits.

Example:

Deficit

Author behavior

Social reciprocity
And interaction

"Often I failed to respond to other people at all"

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Page 5

What is the author's hope in writing this story?

Chapter 1

Pages 8-11

The author engages in certain behaviors that would be labeled as “inappropriate” with his playmates, including hitting Doug and patting Chuckie on the head. Why did the author do these things?

How did people respond to his behavior?

Can you suggest a better response to this behavior?

Page 11

People with autism often lack feelings of _____ that naturally guide most people in their interactions with others.

Pages 11-12

The author describes how he ended up playing by himself rather than with people. What led to this withdrawal?

Chapter 5

One of the characteristics of Asperger's syndrome is "encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus." What is the author's preoccupation that he exhibits at 12-13 years of age, and speculate how this could be translated to a functional skill later in his life.

Chapter 6

Pages 59-61

The author describes another preoccupation. Would you describe it as being abnormal in intensity or focus? Describe how that preoccupation may have been one of the things that eventually helped the author overcome the obstacles in his life.

People with Asperger's often have "savantlike" abilities (areas where they have abnormally high areas of intelligence). What ability is described on page 65, and what does the author attribute this to?

Chapter 9

Page 88

One of the characteristics of Asperger's syndrome is "stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)." What behaviors demonstrated by the author would fit that description?

Chapter 16

Page 151

In the book *Asperger's Syndrome*, by Tony Attwood, Aspergian's are described as often being fascinated with mechanical objects such as trains. What are the reasons the author gives he gives for his own affinity with machines?

Chapter 18

Page 175

Did the author's difficulty relating to peers persist into young adulthood? How?

Chapter 20

Page 189

How did the author try to learn conversational skills? Was it successful? Why or why not?

Page 191

How did the author eventually figure out what he should have said to prevent the conversational breakdown that he had with Laurie?

Chapter 24

Page 236

To receive a diagnosis of Asperger's Disorder, a person has to demonstrate a qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least 2 of 4 criteria. What are these 4 criteria?

Page 238

Asperger's is an _____ disorder.

Page 239-240

The author discusses his shift from "being weird to being eccentric." How did he make that shift?



Chapter 26

Page 247

Why did the author show little interest in girls?

Chapter 27

Page 253

People with Asperger's syndrome often exhibit 'literal thinking.' For example, "Bite my head off" does not mean that the person would actually get their head bitten off, but rather that someone is speaking in a quick and angry way. Provide an example of 'literal thinking' displayed by the author.

Page 254-257

What are the things the author's wife does to help make the relationship succeed? How would you use that knowledge as a teacher?

Chapter 28

Page 260

When the author returned to Amherst, he described his experience of turning failure into a success. This occurred when people welcomed him with open arms. To what does he attribute that particular success?

Chapter 29

Page 270-271

How does the author use 'self talk' to overcome obstacles?

Instructions to Discussion Questions

These open-ended questions are designed to stimulate your thinking, using the material from the text as a springboard. These questions require you synthesize the concepts presented in the text.

Discussion Questions

Asperger's syndrome was added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders fairly recently. Before then, children were given inaccurate diagnoses by mental health professionals. What are the risks of getting an incorrect diagnosis, and accepting that diagnosis at face value?

After reading chapter 24 and learning about the author's reaction to his diagnosis, respond to the statement "It is bad to diagnose people, the label doesn't do them any good."

The author describes how he ended up playing by himself rather than with people. If you were a teacher of a child with Asperger's syndrome, what might you try to do to draw him out?

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Throughout the text, the author described many mismatches between peoples negative perceptions of the author's behavior, and the author's actual intention. What does the authors experience tell you about "jumping to conclusions" about the cause of peoples behavior?

If you were to design a high school curriculum for persons with Asperger's Syndrome, how would it be different from the High School that the author attended.

The author describes his encounter with a poisonous snake at his hotel, and responding by shooting it with a gun and calling housekeeping to clean the patio? How might this response differ from that of a person without Asperger's syndrome.

The author discusses his experience in writing a resume, and that everything but his age and education was true. He did get the job, however, and was successful. Why do you think he was hired? Given that many Aspergians might be in a similar dilemma, what could they do to demonstrate employability.

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When the author went out on his own, he found working with the band a reinforcing and successful experience. Given what you know about his creative strengths and social skills, speculate why this experience was successful. Do you think a more conventional occupation, such as driving a truck or working in a restaurant, would have been just as successful? Why or why not?

The author discusses his shift from “being weird to being eccentric.” How can a person with Asperger’s syndrome make that shift?

The ‘competence-deviance’ hypothesis states that the more someone can competently contribute to society, the more society will accept that person’s deviance. Do you agree with that statement, after learning about the author’s history? Please explain your answer.

In the Epilogue, the author talks about how he made peace with his parents. What does this chapter teach about the value of forgiveness?

**CONGRATULATIONS!
YOU'RE FINISHED!**

Footnote

¹An instructor's Guide, with the answers to the study questions, has been prepared to accompany these readings. Bona fide instructors may obtain the guide from Dr. Dyer at Dyerk@elms.edu.