

# Welcome to Fred: a novel

By Brad Whittington



## Discussion Questions

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### ***Chapter 1***

The opening chapter introduces Mark's sense of alienation and the nature of life in a small rural town.

1. Why did Mark feel alienated?
2. Mark's sense of alienation became more acute during his teen years. Why do you think this change occurred?
3. Are there times during your life when you have felt alienated in some way? If so, why? (If not, how did you achieve this miracle?)
4. How would you compare life in a small town to life in the suburbs? In the city?
5. Is Mark's sense of alienation a product of his isolation in a small town or because of something else?

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### ***Chapter 2***

As a preacher's kid, Mark bounces from one town and school to another.

1. What effect does constant mobility have on a kid? On an adult?
2. What other professions that would cause a family to move constantly? What characteristics do the children in those families share with preacher's kids? In what ways are they different?
3. Do you like Mark Cloud? (Check a box)  Yes  No.
4. How does life in a house with a basement and an attic differ from a house without them? (Especially from a kid's perspective.)
5. Why do you think the author referred to M as "a Negro boy" instead of using some other term? Do you have any particular feelings about the use of this term as opposed to other terms?
6. How 'bout dem chitlins?
7. How much do you know about Marcus Garvey, Malcom X and Thurgood Marshall? Why?

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### *Chapter 3*

1. The Creature refers to “the Mark.” What is the mark?
2. The Creature talks in riddles. Do you recognize any of the things she mentions?
3. Do you think it is important to know the background for the things the Creature says in order to understand or enjoy the story?
4. Why would the Creature refuse to give her real name?
5. What is the significance of the names she does give, Lilith and Naamah?

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### ***Chapter 4***

1. Why is Mark drawn back to the Creature?
2. What do you think of M's comments about prayer?
3. What do you think of M's theory about God?
4. M postulates that things always happen for a reason. Mark speculates that sometimes things just happen and there is no reason. Who is right?

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### ***Chapter 5***

1. Popular music and pop culture has a strong influence on Mark's world view. What things do you think have influenced your world view?
2. What version of the Bible do you think Terri read?

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### *Chapter 6*

1. Why do you think Mark is both fascinated by and fearful of the counter culture and its lack of boundaries?
2. Is there anything that you find fascinating and frightening?
3. Why did M follow Mark to the gap? Why didn't he go in?
4. Mark nurses Pauline back to health single-handedly. What does this reveal about Mark's nature?
5. Mark learns Pauline's name in Chapter Four, but he continues to call her the Creature until the middle of Chapter Six. Why does he start calling her by her name?
6. As Pauline progresses through her story, her manner of speaking changes. How do you account for this change?
7. As Pauline progresses through her story, Mark's attitude changes. How does it change and why?
8. When Pauline leaves with the knife, where do you think she is going and for what purpose?

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### ***Chapter 7***

1. Evidently Pauline was stalking Victor. Why did she defend him instead of attack him?
2. Mark found a card stuck in Pauline's Bible at Psalm 51. Why is this significant?



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### ***Chapter 8***

1. Why does Mark suspect that the move to Fred will be different from the others he has experienced?

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***Chapter 9 – Chapter 11***

No questions.

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### ***Chapter 12***

2. Mark reads a book that challenges his beliefs and causes him to question them. Is this good or bad?
3. Did Mark do the right thing by not mentioning his doubts to anyone? What might have happened if he had?
4. Should Mac and Peggy have been replaced by teachers who were more effective in the Sunday School class?

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### ***Chapter 13***

1. Why was Mark reluctant to declare his love to Becky?
2. Why does Mark feel comfortable around Jolene but not with Becky?

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### *Chapter 14*

1. Jolene plays jokes on everyone she dates. Why?
2. Jolene never gets asked out on a second date. Why? (Explore beyond “because she plays jokes on the guy” to explore why the guy doesn’t persevere.)

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### *Chapter 15*

1. Mark sits through a funeral service realizing that though everyone around him seems emotional, he feels detached and unaffected. What are some possible reasons why he would feel this way?
2. Would you consider Sonia's reaction to the funeral appropriate? Understandable? Why?
3. After the funeral Mark visits the Walker house twice selling papers. Compare/contrast the behavior of Parker and Sonia on these visits. What do you infer from their actions and comments?

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### *Chapter 16*

1. What do you infer from Parker's comments at the fire?
2. Mark and Ralph have a discussion that highlights the differing expectations for "regular" Christians and the clergy and their families. Is this double-standard justified? Why?
3. Bonus question: Can you spot the technical flaw in Chapter 16?

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### ***Chapter 17***

1. Does C.J. offer good advice to the lovelorn?
2. What are the other reasons Matthew Cloud sent Sonia to the Harmon's house?
3. Don't you wish you had that old Silvertone Guitar now?



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### *Chapter 18*

1. Why does Mac tell Mark about his past with Sonia?
2. Should Mac have been reinstated as Sunday School teacher after he recovered? Why?
3. How does being drawn into Jolene's scheme affect Mark?
4. Why doesn't Mark push past Becky's comment about being a friend and deliver his poem?

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### ***Chapter 19***

1. Discuss the reasons for the differing reactions of Mark and C.J. to the ride on the Roller Coaster.
2. Is there any significance to Mark's response to his terror during the ride on the Roller Coaster?

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### *Chapter 20*

1. How does Mark's anticipation of meeting the girl of his dreams in California relate to his history with Becky?
2. After four years of attempting to assimilate into Fredonian culture, the proposed trip to California causes Mark to resurrect his dreams of the counterculture. Is this a mistake? What are the likely outcomes?
3. There seems to be a distinct difference between the way Mark views things and the way his dad views things. How are they different?

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### *Chapter 21*

1. Matt treats his faith as something very practical. Mark is willing to accept his father's beliefs but is nervous about actually testing them. Mark seems to see Christianity more as a philosophy, a useful way of seeing the world. Matt seems to see it as an interaction with an actual entity. How would these two viewpoints affect the life of those who accept them?
2. Matt assumes his insight into fixing the car is an answer to prayer. Mark is not convinced. What do you think?
3. What do you think Matt would do if Mark voiced his doubts?

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### *Chapter 22*

1. Mark decides to abandon his project of fitting in and place his hopes for acceptance on the trip to California. If he asked you for your opinion of what he should do, what would you tell him?
2. During the revival Mark again finds himself in a situation where those around him are profoundly affected by what is happening, but he appears to be immune to the emotion. How is this like the experience at the funeral? How is it different?
3. During the revival services, people who have never seemed interested in spiritual things respond to Pastor Bates invitation? Why?
4. As all those around him stream to the altar during the invitation, Mark feels pressure to do the same. Why does he feel this?
5. Mark resists the pressure to come to the altar. Why? Is his response appropriate? Why?
6. Parker thinks he deserves hell because he killed Peggy and Kristen. Mac says his own offense is worse because he wanted to kill Parker. What do you think?

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### ***Chapter 23***

1. Do you think there was a divine purpose behind the car problems?

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### ***Chapter 24***

2. Was Matt being dishonest when he introduced himself as Elder Cloud?
3. Why is it that when you get preachers together, they talk forever?

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### *Chapter 25*

1. Can you answer this question: “I had lain on my back on a midnight hill in the wilderness of Fred, deeply aware that the heavens declare the handiwork of God. The magnificence and complexity of nature suggested an even more magnificent and complex mind behind it all. But I had also seen that nature was cold and relentless. The nourishing rain may fall on the just and the unjust, alike, but devastating floods also destroyed the just and the unjust, alike. The mind behind nature sometimes seemed as unconscious and aloof as a machine blindly churning out results, matter indifferently following the principles of particle physics. How could I get a sense of majesty and futility from the same source?”
2. Can you really be too smart for your own good? Why?



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***Chapter 26***

No questions.

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### ***Chapter 27***

1. Why did Pastor Jordan send back Pauline's letter unopened?
2. What did Pauline mean when she wrote, "there weren't nothing to forgive"? Was she right?

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***Chapter 28***

No questions.

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### *Chapter 29*

1. Was Bishop Ussher right?
2. Matt says “Deciding if the Bible is true or not is not really an intellectual question; it is a spiritual question.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. Matt says “If you want to find out if the Bible is true, you should ask Parker Walker. Or Sonia.” What did he mean? What did they have in common?

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### ***Chapter 30***

1. Why does Mark burn his copy of “The Mysterious Stranger”?

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### ***General Questions about Welcome to Fred***

2. What would you say is the primary theme of “Welcome to Fred”?
3. Can you think of other themes?
4. Discuss the use of popular music in *Welcome to Fred* and how it relates to Mark’s changing worldview. Give examples.
5. Do you think the PK experience for Heidi and Hannah differs from that of Mark? How?