

Summer Reading Guide
English I and Honor's English I
A Chance in the World by Steve Pemberton

Author's Introduction: TED TALKS: A Chance in the World: The Impact of Gratitude | Steve Pemberton
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xEKjAHcGiQ>

Quick Write: Do you think an attitude of gratitude is an asset in life. Why? Why not?

In your opinion is it better to be a receiver rather than a giver?

What steps are you taking to achieve your dreams, rise above obstacles, create opportunities for others, and preserve?

Discussion Guide Questions

1: The book begins with an epigraph from mythology scholar Edith Hamilton: "The fullness of life is in the hazards of life. And, at the worst, there is that within us, which can turn defeat into victory." How well does the epigraph work as a way to introduce the book?"

2: The book title comes from a statement from a babysitter, when Pemberton was only a year and a half old. What does "a chance" mean in this context? What "chances" did he pass up? Would he have become successful if he grew up in a more stable or more friendly environment?

3: Do you think his father knew about his existence? It's a question that pops up throughout the book, from his earliest memories to his quest to find his birth parents. If his father knew about him, why didn't he intercede on his child's behalf?

4: Books appear several times in Pemberton's story – the Robinson Rules, Watership Down, the ending where he reads his son's favorite book to him. All of these books are symbolic, what does each represent? What book, or books, have been influential in your own life?

5: There are many "side" characters woven throughout the story as part of Steve's formation: multiple social service workers, including Mike; Mr. Sykes and Mrs. Dottin from Upward Bound; Ms. Levine; the

facilities crew at Boston College, Nurse Nancy. Which of their actions do you agree or disagree with? What do you suppose their influence on Steve was?

6: Adoption laws are either closed (where almost nobody can access court or medical records related to the adoption, including the adopted child and close biological relatives) and open (where the adoptee and his/her birth parents can access records). Massachusetts appears to have been a closed state, which made it impossible for Pemberton's grandfather to find his grandchildren. But open adoptions have their own problems. What kind of adoption do you think is better? What is more beneficial to a child?

7: Similarly, this is a book that puts "Social Services" on trial. Do you think that the workload was so overwhelming that their only concern was just putting a roof over the head of Steve? What were some of your responses to the various social workers as you read the story? How did you interpret the scene when Steve goes to the hospital as a child after an abusive incident and come so close to being "free"?

8: Why do you think Pemberton wrote this book?

9: In the acknowledgements, Steve states the story would not be possible "without the intervening of a thousand angels." How do you interpret that statement, considering all he had been through?

10: Do you know about your family history? What are some of your favorite stories? Would you be interested in researching more about it? Where would you start?

Whitehaven High School Writing Contest

Steve Pemberton's *A Chance in the World* narrates the story of a boy who defied the odds. Despite the mental and physical abuse Steve encountered in his foster home, kindness came to him in unexpected ways: the gift of books from a woman whose name he didn't know, the director of the Upward Bound program who saw Steve's potential and helped to cultivate it, a social worker who helped him walk away, and a teacher who opened his doors to Steve, offering him a safe place to live. Steve Pemberton overcame a bleak, often terrifying and abusive past to grow into a remarkable man and find his way home.

Write about a time you faced a challenge of some kind. What did you do? What were your survival strategies? Who gave you hope? What happened in the end?

Format: Memoir/personal essays or poems. Typed & double-spaced, with your name & contact info. 5 pages maximum.