Sample Discussion Questions: 
*It’s Kind of a Funny Story*

1. In the first half of the novel, Craig decides that he is not doing as well as his peers at the Executive Pre-Professional High School because he is not “gifted” — instead, he feels that he is “just smart” and “work[s] hard.” What are the differences between being “gifted” and being a moderately intelligent person who works hard? What social and economic forces do you think make Craig feel like he cannot succeed in the world without a special intellectual gift? (see pages 96-7)

2. Craig seems to go back and forth between blaming his eating disorder and depression on “chemistry” — the chemical balance in his brain and body — and the circumstances of his life. What do you think is the relationship between these two things? How does the placebo effect that he experiences soon after he starts taking his medication (when it cannot yet be taking full effect) fit into your understanding of this relationship? Why do you think so many young people are being prescribed brain chemistry-altering medications for depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders? (chemistry, pages 34, 104, 108-9, 240; placebo p. 113-4; generation on meds 119)

3. Throughout the novel, Craig hears the voice of a drill sergeant or other military officer in his head, who calls him “soldier” and speaks firmly with him about his depression and options. Sometimes the voice berates him for laziness, other times it encourages him to take action, and shows some affection for him — but when he decides to commit suicide, it does nothing to stop him. Why do you think this voice takes the form of a macho soldier? What are the cultural associations of the US military for a person (male, American, white, financially comfortable) like Craig? If Craig is fighting a mental battle, who or what is the “enemy”? (see pages 29, 45, 98-99, 129, 161, 209, 287, 379)

4. In the hospital psychiatric ward Craig finds relief in the simplicity of life and the limited choices that he has to make, comparing it to “preschool.” What are the benefits and drawbacks of having so many options as a teenager and an adult, from what to wear to what to eat to who to hang out with? What makes the restrictions of preschool feel comfortable (as compared to, for example, the limitations created by poverty or living in a war zone) for Craig? Why do you think that going “back” to the activities and options of childhood for a while helps him begin to find perspective on how to live an adult life? (see pages 266, 287)

5. In the second half of the novel Craig connects with other patients in the psychiatric ward, becoming socially integrated in his new environment, and starts to feel better about himself. List all of the things that he does, either for himself or for others, that make him feel good while he is in the ward. How are these actions different from or similar to the kinds of things that he was doing before he was admitted to the hospital? What lessons can Craig bring from his life in the ward to the world outside about what makes life worth living, and what social expectations are less important to uphold? (see pages 270, 290-3, 317, 333-6, 399-410, 423-6 for some examples and 441-4 for lessons)
Sample Discussion Questions:
*Thirteen Reasons Why*

1. The narrative of this novel switches back and forth between the voices and temporalities of Hannah, who records her experiences before committing suicide, and Clay, who listens to the tapes after Hannah has died. As a result, many of Clay's thoughts work as a kind of commentary on Hannah's story: expressing his emotional reactions to her disclosures and comparing her descriptions of her life to the rumors that he heard about her. What does this back-and-forth reveal about how much (or little) we know about other people's inner lives? How does this technique create tension and urgency in the novel?

2. Hannah refers to the series of events leading up to her death as a “snowball” (31, 41). Why do you think that she uses this metaphor? Name some of the “small” instances of bullying and disrespect that contribute to her unhappiness. Do you think these can be thought of as forms of violence? (For instance, see pages 29-30, 39-40, 50-2, 100, 163, 189-92.) How do these smaller forms of bullying connect to the more obvious physical and mental violence that she also experiences, from being spied on to nonconsensual sexual activity? How can you know what forms of bullying are a “big deal” and what aren’t?

3. “Rape culture” is a term used to describe a social context in which sexual assault and abuse are made to seem normal, and victims may even be blamed for assaults against them. From the outside, Clay and Hannah's town seems like a nice, comfortable place to live. But Hannah's experiences – and those of others girls, like Jessica, whom Bryce rapes at a party with Justin's help – show that rape culture is a regular part of this “nice” environment. Beyond Jessica’s rape, what other elements point to the rape culture that underlies daily life in this town? How do some people take part in it even when they don’t commit physically aggressive acts? (see pages 50-2, 80-1, 85-9, 141-5, 277-9).

4. When Hannah allows Bryce to engage in sexual acts with her in the hot tub, she says that she “let go” and gave in to her reputation. What do you think she means by this, and by the claim that she “use[d]” Bryce to “let go of me, completely” (pages 264-5)? If Hannah never explicitly said “no” to Bryce but he clearly saw her discomfort and unhappiness, do you think this interaction still count as rape? Why do you think that this encounter helped Hannah decide to commit suicide?

5. Clay repeatedly mentions that he always liked Hannah and was interested in her, but was afraid of what associating with her would do to his reputation. Hannah always wanted to be liked by others, but struggled to fit in. How can being part of a social group both help people find support and happiness and also serve as a threat to individuality and ethical behavior? What action does Clay take at the end of the novel to try to use his social abilities for good, instead of as part of a destructive system? What could you do? (see page 287-8)
Sample Discussion Questions:
*Romeo & Juliet* (No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels)

1. Act One (pages 1-52): Shakespeare never provides an explanation for the “ancient grudge” between the rival families, the Montagues and the Capulets. Who, or what, might be to blame? Why does Romeo agree to crash the Capulets’ party, despite his own premonition of his impending death? Why does Tybalt feel so disrespected by Romeo’s presence at the party? Does his uncle’s attempt to diffuse his nephew’s anger actually fuel it? If so, why? (see pages 2-12, 34-40, 45-46)

2. Act Two (pages 53-96): After discovering Romeo at the party, Tybalt exclaims that “to strike him dead is not a sin!” What is Tybalt after in challenging Romeo? Is it really his death, or something else? Why don’t Romeo’s friends warn him of Tybalt’s challenge? Based on their conversation before Romeo enters, they seem to believe that he causes a serious threat. (see pages 76-81)

3. Act Three (pages 97-146): Although it is Romeo that Tybalt challenges, it is Mercutio that is ready to fight. Why does Mercutio challenge Tybalt? What are we to make of the gentle words that Romeo has for Tybalt, who has openly insulted him? Why do his friends see it as “dishonorable, vile submission”? Is Romeo to blame for changing his mind after Mercutio is slain? Is there another, less violent, way for Romeo to avenge the death of his friend? To what extent are peer pressures responsible for Romeo’s decision to fight Tybalt? (see pages 99-108)

4. Act Four (pages 147-174): Even the Friar says that “this desperate situation requires desperate action,” and Juliet pulls out a dagger that she is carrying and threatens to kill herself. Is this further evidence that the societal and adult influences around them contribute to acts of violence? Whereas Romeo resorts to violence against others, Juliet is prepared to commit violence upon herself. Does this suggest that there may be a gender influence in teen violence and suicide? (see pages 151-153)

5. Act Five (pages 175-203): When he arrives at Juliet’s tomb, Romeo commits a second murder: of Juliet’s betrothed, the Count Paris. By some definitions, this makes him a “serial killer” (two separate murders committed with a cooling off period in between). What does that tell us about the extreme acts of violence that Romeo has become capable of engaging in, despite his pleas for peace again, as in Act Three? And, ultimately, how could the two teenagers’ suicides have been prevented? (see pages 188-193)