

Thank you for signing up for our TalkFest session on "Captain Fantastic"!

As the name TalkFest suggests, it is our intention for everyone to be able to participate and decide which of the issues raised by the movie they find most engaging. It is in the hope of enriching the conversation that we are providing some additional resources and questions, not as required reading or points to be followed but as food for thought.

Additional Resources

- [Captain Fantastic Website](#)
- [The History of Homeschooling](#)
- [Interview with director Matt Ross](#)

Food for Thought

Director Matt Ross explains how “Ben has given up the outside world and whatever personal ambitions it held for him to devote his life to being the best father he thinks he can be. Is he the best father in the world or the worst? Is what he’s doing insane or insanely great?” What do you think? Does Ben’s extreme form of conscious parenting make him into a superhero, i.e. Captain Fantastic?

1. In an interview Viggo Mortensen explains how Ben “is fighting rigidity, and yet has become rigid in his fight.” How can you explain this contradiction? Is it unavoidable? If Ben loathes fascism so much, how is it that he often denies his children freedom (for example, to eat pancakes) and makes them adhere to a highly regimented routine? Can this be extrapolated to political regimes?
2. In a 1969 article “School is Bad for Children,” John Holt, a proponent of homeschooling, wrote “It is a rare child who can come through his schooling with much left of his curiosity, his independence or his sense of his own dignity, competence and worth.” Would you agree? Is homeschooling the best alternative to conventional schools?
3. Not all parents are as well-read as Ben Cash. What, if anything, should be done to ensure that homeschooled kids have access to a quality education?
4. In *Walden* (1854), Henry David Thoreau wrote: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” To what extent is the Cash family one more example of the classic American back-to-nature journey of self-discovery?
5. Not all people who go off-grid do so for the same reason. Some might be left-wing environmentalists, others right-wing survivalists. How would your reaction to the Cash family have been different if they had embodied a different, more conservative, set of values?
6. When, if ever, should parents be denied custody of their children for following an unconventional lifestyle? Is depriving children of a “normal” childhood a form of child abuse, as Ben’s father-in-law suggests? What is in the best interest of the children? How happy and well-prepared will Ben’s children be once they leave the family bubble?

7. Noam Chomsky is quoted as saying “If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world.” Do you agree that it is in our hands to make the world a better place or do you think that the lives of the powerless will always be controlled by the powerful?
8. “The business of America is business.” This quote, attributed to Calvin Coolidge, was later taken up by Ronald Reagan when promoting his trickle-down concept of economics. Do you agree that if we focus our efforts and resources on business, then the ensuing elevated economic growth will do away with problems like poverty, access to health care and adequate housing?
9. Does relying on government hand-outs make us less independent and less free? Does our desire for material goods enslave us? Do you agree with Thoreau when he says that “a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.” Is it possible or even desirable to be truly self-sufficient?
10. The education Ben gives his children is based on always telling them the truth. Should children always be told the truth or is it preferable to protect them from concepts they are too young to understand?
11. How important is it for children to understand where their food comes from? Often meat is presented in a form that bears no resemblance to the animal it came from, such as chicken nuggets and hamburgers. Is this a form of disguising the truth to make it more palatable? If we are going to eat meat, should we be prepared to hunt for it ourselves? Why was Vespyr unable to kill the sheep?
12. At her funeral, Ben tells the congregation that “Leslie practiced Buddhism, which to her was a philosophy and not an organized religion. In fact, Leslie abhorred all organized religions. To her, they were the most dangerous fairy tales ever invented, designed to elicit blind obedience, and strike fear into the hearts of the innocent and the uninformed.” Is this a fair assessment of religion? Does religion have any redeeming qualities? Could the same be said about political parties?
13. The film weaves together Ben's personal denial of any responsibility in his wife's suicide with his refusal to accept the norms of society. What does the outcome of the film suggest about acceptance, compromise and the need to challenge our own beliefs?

TalkFest Project

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