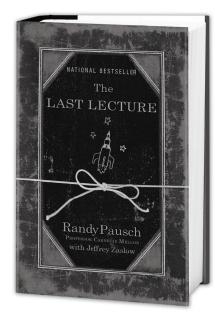
THE LAST LECTURE

A Guide for Educators, Parents, and Book Clubs



The Last Lecture is a memoir, a celebration of life, and a testament to the power of childhood dreams. But it is also, perhaps most of all, a book of lessons.

The book is filled with all the ideas and observations that Randy Pausch wanted to share with his three young children. "These are the things I won't get the chance to tell them over the next twenty years," he said. "I'm trying to put myself in a bottle that will one day wash up on the beach for them."

After the book was released, Randy was most moved and pleased to learn that educators—middle- and high-school teachers, as well as college professors—were showing the video of his lecture to their students, and then using the book as a companion teaching tool. Randy was also thrilled to receive countless emails from parents saying that the lessons in the book were resonating in their households, too—that they were using the book to spark a dialogue with their own children.

There are several ways to access both the book and lecture as teaching tools. The lecture itself is available for free on YouTube, Google Video or at www.TheLastLecture.com. On the site, you can also order a DVD from Carnegie Mellon University. Videos featuring highlights from the lecture—including footage from *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, ABC News, and The Wall Street Journal Online—are also available at www.TheLastLecture.com.

Many educators choose to first show their students the lecture, or clips from it. That way students are familiar with Randy, the cadence of his voice, and the humor and heart to be found in his delivery. When students then read the book, it's as if they can hear the Randy they saw on stage.

The basic questions students might want to think about while reading the book are these:

Why has this lecture/book struck a chord with so many people?

Where is the speaker/author "coming from"?

What are my childhood dreams? How might I achieve them?

What were the dreams my parents had and how did they fulfill them?

Who are mentors I can turn to? What lessons have they taught me?

And what wisdom would I choose to impart to the world if it was my last chance? What are the lessons of my own life?

For educators who'd like to delve deeper into the book, chapter by chapter, here are some suggestions for discussions, and questions, students might ask themselves. (It should be noted that in nearly every case, depending on the teaching level and discipline, educators may want to use these same topics as a springboard to spark more self-reflective—"have-you-ever"-style—discussions.)

Introduction

Randy Pausch describes his cancer as "an engineering problem." How was this a helpful way to look at his illness?

He talks about the lecture as a means of expression, and a way to reach his kids: "If I were a painter, I would have painted for them. If I were a musician, I would have composed music. But I am a lecturer. So I lectured." There are so many ways to communicate. What are your own avenues for self-expression?

Randy has always recognized the importance of time management. What did you think of his decision to work on the book while riding his bike?

Chapter 1: An Injured Lion Still Wants to Roar

Randy almost didn't go to Pittsburgh to deliver his last lecture. His wife Jai had wanted him to stay home with her and the kids. What did you learn from his discussions with her about this?

Randy chose "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" as the topic for his lecture. In what ways would this allow him to tell the story of his life, and to enable the dreams of others?

Chapter 3: The Elephant in the Room

Randy decided to begin his talk in a specific way – showing his CT scans, introducing "the elephant in the room," assuring everyone he's not in denial, and doing push-ups. What made this effective? What were you thinking watching this for the first time via video?

Chapter 4: The Parent Lottery

Randy said he realized many of his dreams because he had terrific parents. What details from his childhood do you think led to the successes he had later in life? Are there lessons in Randy's story for people who've had less-fulfilling childhoods, or absentee parents? What advice might you give to those who didn't win "the parent lottery"?

Chapter 5: The Elevator in the Ranch House

In his talk, Randy encouraged parents to allow their children to paint on their bedroom walls. "As a favor to me," he said, "let 'em do it. Don't worry about the home's resale value." The real message he says he was trying to give was this: Find ways to help your kids be creative. Nurture those instincts in them.

What would you paint on your bedroom walls if you were given permission to do so? What other creative outlet would you like to pursue, if your parents gave the OK?

Chapter 6: Getting to Zero G

The chapter ends with the line: "If you can find an opening, you can probably find a way to float through it." What's the lesson to be learned from Randy's attempts to get onto that "Vomit Comet"?

Chapter 7: I Never Made It to the NFL

This is a chapter about football, but so many of the lessons in it can apply elsewhere in our lives:

Talk about ways fundamentals are important off the playing field, too.

Randy believed our critics are often the ones saying they still care about us. How in your own life has a critic helped you become a better person?

Randy loved using "head fakes." What are some other head fakes that teachers and parents have used?

Chapter 11: The Happiest Place on Earth

Throughout the book, Randy says: "Brick walls are there for a reason. They're not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something."

What are the brick walls you've faced in your own life? How did you get over them?

Chapter 12: The Park Is Open Until 8 p.m.

In this chapter, we see Randy as an advocate for his own medical care. We also get a sense of how he decided to adopt a positive attitude. Have there been people in your own life who've faced the challenge of serious illness? What did you learn from them? How has Randy's journey made you consider how you'll approach your own mortality?

Chapter 14: The Dutch Uncle

Randy credits his professor Andy van Dam with telling him the tough-love things he needed to hear. What was it about Dr. van Dam's delivery and message that resonated with Randy? Who in your own life has told you things about yourself that made you reconsider your actions or behavior?

Chapter 15: Pouring Soda in the Backseat

Throughout the book, Randy makes a distinction between "people" and "things." What did you think of his decision to empty that can of soda in the backseat of his car?

Chapter 17: Not All Fairy Tales End Smoothly

In this chapter and chapter 19 (about the birth of his son) Randy reminds readers that even wonderful life events – such as a wedding or the birth of a child – are fraught with unexpected dangers. What did you learn from the way Randy and Jai handled the problems before them in these chapters?

Chapter 18: Lucy, I'm Home

Was Randy right? Was there no need to fix the dents in those two damaged cars?

Chapter 21: Jai

It is clear in the book that Randy and Jai have a deep love for one another. And yet, like other married couples, they've had to work hard on their relationship. Randy's illness created additional challenges. By reading about how they've faced the issues between them, what did you learn about getting along with others, about mutual respect, and about the power of love?

Chapter 23: I'm on My Honeymoon, But If You Need Me...

What do you think of Randy's time-management tips? Would you have walked out of that grocery store, knowing you overpaid by \$16.55? Do you have to-do lists?

Chapter 24: A Recovering Jerk

Randy believes the number one goal for educators should be helping students learn how to judge themselves. How crucial do you think this is in the learning process? Have you relied on feedback loops in your own life? Has anyone ever told you that you were being a jerk?

Chapter 27: The Promised Land

Randy and his colleagues tried to attract girls into the field of computer science. He's proud of "The Alice Project," and calls it his greatest legacy. What advice would you give to his colleagues, as they go about trying to carry on Randy's vision?

Chapter 28: Dream Big

Randy missed the 1969 moonwalk because he was sent to bed by camp counselors. Have you ever wished adults in your life were less rigid? What advice would you give to adults about helping kids to dream big?

Chapter 29: Earnest Is Better Than Hip

Do you agree with Randy? Is earnest better than hip? Is fashion truly commerce masquerading as hip? Or can fashion be a way in which people express themselves?

Chapter 32: Don't Complain, Just Work Harder

Randy admired Sandy Blatt and Jackie Robinson because they didn't complain. As Randy put it: "Complaining is not a strategy." Do you agree?

Chapter 35: Start By Sitting Together

Have you ever had trouble working in groups? How might Randy's tips help you get along better with others in the future?

Chapter 39: Be the First Penguin

Randy writes that "experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted." How do you think his First Penguin Award was able to inspire his students?

Chapter 41: The Lost Art of Thank-You Notes

Do you agree with Randy that handwritten thank-you notes, even in our computer age, can offer a kind of magic? When was the last time you sent a handwritten thank-you?

Chapter 47: A Bad Apology Is Worse Than No Apology

Randy describes two "classic bad apologies." Have you ever given someone such an apology? How did it turn out?

Chapter 55: All You Have to Do Is Ask

What would you like to ask for that you haven't been able to find the courage to articulate? What do you think will happen if you "just ask"?

Chapter 56: Make a Decision: Tigger or Eeyore

OK. So which one are you? And why? If you'd like to be more of a Tigger, how might you go about that?

Chapter 59: Dreams for My Children

Randy says parents don't realize the power of their words: "Depending on a child's age and sense of self, an offhand comment from Mom or Dad can feel like a shove from a bulldozer." Have you ever felt that way?

What are the vital messages to be drawn from the way Randy is saying goodbye to his kids, and from the tangible things he is leaving behind for them?

Chapter 61: The Dreams Will Come to You

Randy realized that he didn't give the lecture because he wanted to. He gave it because he "had to." Are there things inside of you that "need to come out"?

As you read this final chapter of the book, what were the emotions you were feeling? How would you describe the legacy of Randy Pausch?

Students and educators are encouraged to leave comments on the message board at www. The Last Lecture.com. As Randy said, the book was written for his children, but it has been incredibly meaningful for him that young people are finding it both useful and inspirational.

