

# *The Last Lecture*

by Randy Pausch



**End in Mind**

1. Does *The Last Lecture* make you rethink your own priorities –what you want out of life, your work, your friendships, your marriage? Does it make you re-evaluate—or confirm—the things you thought were important?
2. Why is it that *The Last Lecture* has struck such a chord with people? Co-writer Zaslow says that "it's because we're all dying," and that Randy's fate is ours. Do you agree? Are there any other reasons?
3. Summing up a theme of his lecture and book, Pausch writes: "We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand." [Page 32] This is one of many clichés he admits he loves and uses liberally in *The Last Lecture*. Reflect on a time you were dealt a bad hand, but made the best of it. How did this define your experience? How does the challenge of not getting what you wanted affect the way you reflect on that experience or affect the way you share that experience with others?
4. Pausch began his lecture "Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams" by saying he wasn't going to deal with big questions of religion or spirituality, and he sticks to that pattern in *The Last Lecture*. Take a moment to reflect on and share your childhood dreams. If you were going to create a "last lecture" based on these dreams, what life lessons would be included? How would you achieve these childhood dreams?
5. *The Last Lecture* balances general advice such as "dream big" with specific tips – for example, about how to work well in small groups. "Instead of saying, 'I think we should do A, instead of B,' try 'What if we did A, instead of B?'" [Page 190] Which, if any, of the tips struck you as most helpful? How does this reframing create connections between people?
6. Many cancer patients are bombarded with the advice to "be optimistic" or "think positively." This approach has led to a medical backlash alluded to in the chapter "A Way to Understand Optimism." Pausch says his surgeon worries about "patients who are inappropriately optimistic or ill-informed": "It pains him to see patients who are having a tough day healthwise and assume it's because they weren't positive enough." [Page 249] What is Pausch's view of this? Is he appropriately or inappropriately optimistic? Why?
7. Many people who have heard about *The Last Lecture* may be tempted to give the book to someone who has had a devastating diagnosis, or who is perhaps dying, hoping it will provide comfort or cheer. What would you say to them? Is this a book for the living or the dying?