The Contender

Comprehension Questions, pp. 131-167

How does Aunt Pearl react to the news of his first boxing match? What story does she tell Alfred? How is it similar to Alfred’s situation, and yet very different?

Even though the winning “wasn’t sweet,” why do you think Alfred won’t quit boxing?

How does Alfred win his fight against Griffin? How does he feel about it?

How does Uncle Wilson react to Alfred’s boxing? How does he react to his son Jeff’s boxing? How do you explain the difference? What seems to interest Wilson most of all, and what does this tell you about him?

What does Alfred decide about his education?

Whom does Alfred notice on the way into his building? What does he want? Why?

Against whom was Alfred’s third match? What was the outcome?

Why did Donatelli want to talk to Alfred? What did he say Alfred was lacking, and what was Alfred’s response?

What did Donatelli say that Alfred learned? Is he really a contender? Why or why not?

Why is Alfred nervous about his last fight if his boxing career is over regardless of the outcome? What does this say about Alfred?

What does Spoon give Alfred?

If they find James, what will Spoon do for him?
Against whom is Alfred’s last fight? Why is Donatelli against it? Why does Alfred want it so badly?

Describe Alfred’s last fight. What does Donatelli mean when he says, “Now you know, Alfred. Now you know, too”?

What news does Aunt Pearl have for Alfred when he returns? Where does he go?

What does Alfred convince James to do?

What does Alfred know about himself that will help him help James? What advice does he give him? Where do he and James go at the end of the novel?
**Group Discussion Questions**

Directions: *Discuss the following questions as a group.*

Below are four possible themes for this novel. In one or two sentences, explain why each one is true, giving specific examples from *The Contender.*

**It’s the effort and struggle that make a person, not winning or success.**

**Each person must try to find out what he or she is capable of achieving.**

**It takes courage, discipline, hard work, and inner strength to change one’s life.**

**Young people need friends and/or role models to help and guide them.**

Directions: *Below are several quotations taken from The Contender. Analyze them by explaining what each means and the discussing why each is important.*

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<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>What this means</th>
<th>Why this is important</th>
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| “I want to be somebody.”  
“Everybody is somebody.”  
“Somebody special. A champion.”  
Donatelli’s thin lips tightened.  
“Everybody wants to be a champion. That’s not enough. You have to start by wanting to be a contender, the man coming up, the man who knows there’s a good chance he’ll never get to the top, the man who’s willing to sweat and bleed to get as high as his legs and his brains and his heart will take him. That must sound corny to you.”  
“No.”  
“It’s the climbing that makes the man. Getting to the top is an extra reward.” | | |
<p>| “It’s not easy trying to become a contender. It’s never any fun in the beginning. It’s hard work, you’ll want to quit at least once every day. If you quit before you really try, that’s worse than never starting at all. And nothing’s promised you, nothing’s ever promised you.” | | |</p>
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<td>Aunt Pearl was sobbing. “I don’t say I woulda been a star or anything. I don’t know what I’m saying.”</td>
<td>“But you would of liked to try,” said Alfred. “Yes.”</td>
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<td>“Look, Mr. Donatelli, remember how you said the only way you’d ever know is if I got hurt, really hurt in the ring?”</td>
<td>“But it doesn’t matter now.” “Does to me.” “You don’t have to prove anything to me, Alfred.” “To me I do.”</td>
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<td>Alfred felt his mouthpiece fly out... pop-pop, iron pipes, sledgehammers, meat hooks, go ahead, throw everything you got, you gonna have to, gonna stand here all day and all night and take what you got and give it right back, gonna hang in forever, gonna climb, man, gonna keep climbing, you can’t knock me out, nobody ever gonna knock me out, you wanna stop me you better kill me.</td>
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<td>“Don’t worry about that, James. I got plenty of blood for you.” Carefully, Alfred guided him over the rocks and the bushes and the new snow, toward the lights of the avenue.</td>
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**Class Activity**

Prepare a three- to five-minute presentation, to be delivered by everyone in your group, on *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, explaining what it was about, how it addressed the theme of coming of age, who would enjoy it, why you liked it, and who might not want to read it.