*Outliers* Discussion Questions

1. Malcolm Gladwell is interested in what makes some people more successful than others. Overall, how would you describe his thesis, or central premise? Do you agree or disagree with his ideas?

2. What does Gladwell mean by the term "outlier"?

3. Why does Gladwell insist that IQ is not the determining factor in one's ability to achieve success? What does he mean when he suggests that IQ reaches a point of diminishing returns after reaching 130?

4. Gladwell draws upon Robert Sternberg's idea of "practical intelligence." What is practical intelligence, and how does it differ from IQ?

5. According to Gladwell, what is the reason that Asians excell at mathematics? Discuss the cultural and educational differences that he points to as explanation.

6. Why does Gladwell feel there is no such thing as a self-made person. Do you agree? Can you name people who overcame great odds—circumstances not in their favor—to attain success? What about those people that Gladwell offers in support of his argument (Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, or the Beatles, among others)? Do you agree with his assessment that much depends on timing?

7. Do Gladwell's many anecdotes prove his hypothesis? Or do his stories exemplify his ideas? Is there a difference...if so, what? Some critics suggest that Gladwell cherry-picks his facts in order to support his premise. Is that a valid observation or not?

8. Is Gladwell suggesting that success is a matter of luck, the roll of the die? If so—if success depends on timing, birth, and opportunities—then do innate qualities (ambition or raw talent) have any role to play?

9. What personal experiences—people and incidents in your own life—can you think of that support or challenge Gladwell's ideas?

10. What did you find most surprising, humorous or thought-provoking in Gladwell's book? Any "ah-ha!" moments? Any-thing strike you as dubious? Have you come away thinking differently than before? What, if anything, do you feel you've learned?

11. Gladwell gives differing definitions of intelligence. Yet his definition of success is singular—"worldy" success in terms of of wealth, power, and fame. Are there also differing definitions of success that Gladwell doesn't consider? If so, what are they, and what does it take to achieve those versions of success?

Or

1. When does a Canadian hockey player want to be born? Why does it matter?
2. What’s the 10,000 hour rule?
3. What problems might there be in Gladwell’s list of history’s richest individuals?
4. Look at the time of year the techies were born. Do the dates support the time of year claim?
5. What might explain the fact that not all Nobel winners come from the very best colleges, other than Gladwell’s IQ "good enough" claim?
6. Does Chris Langan’s experience mean, as Gladwell claims, that success really isn’t about individual merit?
7. Gladwell claims historical treatment of Jews in both Europe and the US led to their dominance in the garment industry and NYC law firms. How much of an individual Jewish New Yorker’s success should be attributed to these historical factors?
8. Gladwell gives several reasons for Asian academic success. What are they and which do you find most convincing?
9. Do the privileges and advantages Gladwell cites seem as decisive as he claims? Are these advantages unique?
10. What advantages have you benefited from? Why haven’t they been enough to catapult you to an outlier level of success? Alternatively, if you consider yourself very successful, to what do you attribute your success?
11. Rate *Outliers* on a scale of 1 to 5.