

Discussion Questions for *Moneyball*

Some of the major characters to watch for: Billy Beane, Peter Brand, Art Howe (the team's manager), Grady Fuson (the head scout)

1. Billy Beane is attempting to lead his team of scouts toward a new way of making decisions by reframing the problem. In one of the classic scenes, he says to them: "The problem we are trying to solve is that there are rich teams and there are poor teams. Then there's 50 feet of crap and then there's us. It's an unfair game! ... Think differently. We are the last dog at the bowl. You see what happens to the runt of the litter? He dies! ... If we try to play like the Yankees in here we will lose to the Yankees out there."

The scouts do not seem to understand or embrace Billy's request to "think differently." During the ensuing weeks, how does Billy handle the fact that these guys just don't get it and what do you think of his approach?

2. About 40 minutes into the film, the head scout for the A's (Grady Fuson) confronts Billy with these words: "You don't put a team together with a computer, Billy ... Baseball isn't just numbers. It's not science. If it was then anybody could do what we're doing, but they can't because they don't know what we know. They don't have our experience and they don't have our intuition! ... There are intangibles that only baseball people understand. You're discounting what scouts have done for 150 years!"

What do you think of this scout's theory that the best decisions come from "experience" and "intuition." Does he have a point? Is it context specific? What should we do when our data-based decisions conflict with decisions based on experience or intuition?

3. Billy responds to the scout with a seemingly dismissive edict: "Adapt or die." What do you think of Billy's leadership in this moment. Is this a wise response, given this employee's resistance, a foolish response given this employee's 29 years of baseball experience?

4. There are a number of times when the team's manager, Art Howe, defies Billy's requests for line-up changes. Each is trying to put the best possible team on the field, but they are using two different paradigms for making those decisions. How does Billy handle Art's defiance and, given that Billy is Art's boss, what do you think of Billy's approach?

5. This is a story about a leader trying to do more with less. Billy Beane is attempting to apply the theories of statisticians and economists to re-invent the way baseball teams are created. Where else have you seen successful or unsuccessful attempts to get better results with fewer resources (whether in sports, business, non-profit organizations, community-development, etc)? What do you think might be the key drivers of success for these important initiatives?

6. To what extent would you say that Beane was a courageous leader? What are some examples and how much did courage culminate in better results?