

Sioux City Reads 2026 Discussion Starters

- 1) Several of the characters seem to experience various “triggers” throughout the story. Did any of these moments stand out? Are there comparisons to be made, and, if so, what is the purpose of such comparisons?
- 2) When did you first learn about the atomic bomb and its use?
- 3) Although the community at the heart of the story is considered “small town America”, many global events still reach and impact the people living there. Does this remind you of anything from the real world?
- 4) The young boys in this story have a lot of unsupervised time, with mixed results. Discuss the nature of childhood adventure. How have rules changed? What has remained the same since the time this story is set?
- 5) Is prejudice ever justifiable?
- 6) What role does the reputation of one’s family play in one’s own reputation?
- 7) Do you find that the characterization of Noah Bluestone feels authentic? Why or why not?
- 8) What makes a “good” war?
- 9) Identify what power, if any, each female character has in the story. How do the male characters react to said power? What is lost in communication?
- 10) What are readers meant to experience through the perspective of Charlie Bauer, and what role does her history play in the narrative?
- 11) Do you have any stories of a time you were presumed guilty? Did gossip play a role in this? Can gossip only be destructive?
- 12) Consider the idea of a defendant being safer in prison where a lynch mob cannot reach them. Flesh out the nuances of such a situation.
- 13) How was justice served in this story? Did it feel complete?
- 14) Connect the characters of this story to people you know in your life. Any examples you think of right away?
- 15) Is it still possible for someone to have a secret past identity? How would these characters hide their pasts today?
- 16) Discuss “survivor’s guilt”.
- 17) How is masculinity expressed in this story? Find admirable and negative examples.
- 18) Do you have a special spot in nature you like to return to? Where do you feel the most peaceful?
- 19) Would you allow yourself to be framed for a crime committed by someone you love? Where do you draw the line?
- 20) Identify points in the narrative in which clearer communication and/or candid honesty by a character could have shifted the novel’s trajectory.