

The Radical Radiance of the Fishing Fly

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Discussion Guide

- Glancing at the title of *The Radical Radiance of the Fishing Fly*, a prospective reader might assume that this book is about fly fishing.
 - Is it? If not, what do you think it's about?
 - What roles do fly fishing in general, and the art of tying fishing flies, in particular, play in this book?
- Many of the characters in *The Radical Radiance of the Fishing Fly* have experienced loss, grief, and other personal traumas.
 - What does the story reveal about these traumas?
 - Does this fishing trip allow some characters to begin a healing process?
 - For those who do experience healing, what is it about this fishing trip that might have helped them?
 - Is the healing influence of the trip greater on some characters than others?
 - Are there characters whom you believe may never truly be healed?
- The relationship between David and Larry is complex.
 - What is the state of their relationship as the book begins, with David driving to Philadelphia to join Larry on his dream fly fishing trip to Alaska?
 - Does their relationship change because of this trip? If so, how does it change?
 - Do Larry and David change as individuals? If so, who do you think is changed more and why?
 - How might your answers differ if the story were told from Larry's point of view?
- Butch and Zack are both hardworking guides under the control of their father, Wiley.
 - What are their similarities and differences?
 - Compare their relationship with that of David and Larry; are there similarities? Differences?
 - Do Butch and Zack change during this trip?
- What is Zack's role in this story?
 - How are his discussions about poetry with David, and his attempts to write his own poems, relevant to key themes in the story?
- Kathy and Angie are the only women on the trip.
 - Why did Kathy decide to take this trip?
 - Why did Angie?
 - Does it seem realistic that these women who seem so different could remain close friends? Are they as different as they might appear?
 - Ultimately, did Kathy and Angie find what they were seeking when they decided to take this trip?
- David and Kathy are each emotionally wounded.
 - How does David change under the influence of Kathy?
 - Does David change Kathy as well? In what ways?
- Do Larry's fishing flies represent something greater than just fancy ways of attracting fish?
 - Do you believe that Larry's reaction to the loss of his flies was justified or, at least, understandable?
 - Did David manage this situation well or were there things he could have done to handle it better?

- What is the importance to the story of David's rescue of Larry's flies (and the lost luggage of the other fishermen)?
 - Was David's misrepresentation to the Air Denali representative in the service of rescuing the flies justified?
- What is the importance of the Tyler Babcock character to the story? How about Russ? Carl Cooper?
- A character named Luke LaDue makes a cameo appearance as the pilot of the Cessna taking the fishermen into the wilderness.
 - What is the importance of the conversation that takes place between LaDue and David on this flight?
 - Is LaDue also suffering a loss?
- Who is Rick Garrett?
 - What is his importance to the story?
 - What role does he play in demonstrating an important quality about Larry?
 - What lessons about Larry, and about himself, does David learn through his interactions with Garrett?
- At some point in the story, Garrett shares an anecdote about the role fly fishing played in helping him heal from his war wounds. He describes a scene about a fly-fishing trip to fish in the Potomac across from Mt. Vernon, when he spotted an eagle circling George Washington's Mt. Vernon mansion, "looking lost". What does this scene add to the story?
- How does the Alaska wilderness become a character in the story? What sounds, colors, scents, wildlife, plants, are used to bring the wilderness to life?
- Does the Alaska wilderness psychologically heal some of the characters? What aspects of the wilderness help bring about this healing?
- There is a scene when the raft that David and Kathy are riding in come upon a grizzly bear. What is the importance of this scene to the story in general and to an understanding of the changes occurring within David in particular?
- Who are the "conservationists" on Wiley's trip? What do they have in common?
- What roles do T. J. and his band of hunters play in the story?
 - What lessons do Garrett's "warriors" want to teach the hunters?
 - Do they succeed?
 - Do you agree with their tactics?
 - Do you agree with Kathy when she says to David that "a little revenge is a good thing"?
- David studies programmed cell death (apoptosis) professionally.
 - Were you aware of this area of medical research prior to reading this book?
 - What do David and the other travelers learn about death from the life cycle of the salmon that swim upriver to spawn and die and the predators in the Alaskan wilderness?
 - Is there a thematic link between David's area of study and the references to the dead salmon?
 - Do you agree with Kathy's assessment that David's obsession with his research is at least partially based on his fear of death and desire to control it?
- Who is your favorite character? Why did you pick that character?
- Were there scenes in the book that made you laugh? Which scenes? Why?
- What is your favorite scene in the book? Why did it resonate with you?
- A woman's face appears in the clouds on the front cover of the book. What does she

represent?

- Have you ever been on an outdoor adventure with a small group? Did the group dynamics on this fishing trip ring true to you?
- What does “The Radical Radiance of the Fishing Fly” mean to you?
- Discuss the possible implications of the title in light of the current socio-political tensions in the United States and worldwide.