**Book Club Questions**

***Bernie and Clyde***:

What do you think will happen with Bernie and Clyde’s relationship with Magda after this story?

Why is Bernie more inclined to trust Magda?

If Herman hadn’t been disabled, yet Bernie and Clyde were still attacked as retribution, do you think it would have been a good idea to go to this bar? What might Bernie’s motives have been?

How much of Bernie’s desire to get revenge came from his sense of loyalty to Magda, and how much came from his heightened state of mind after the victory of the Cubs?

Magda tells Bernie and Clyde her side of the story, and later on the thugs in leather jackets tell theirs. Is Magda trustworthy? What evidence in the text supports your answer?

Why does Clyde agree to Bernie’s plan? What would have happened to their bond had he not agreed?

***Ask Clarence:***

Why do you think the story starts with the fact that Clarence has no trouble accepting “accurate” compliments? What might this tell the reader about his character, or the story as a whole?

Why is Clarence so nosy, not just with students, but with people appearing in City U for the first time, such as Yolanda, or people who did not appear at all, like Carlos?

Why do you think he decides to go out and personally seek out Carlos and Yolanda, especially after Yolanda slapped him?

How do you think Clarence got to become such a trustworthy person in the world of City U?

Ask Clarence is the only story in City U that features characters from another story interacting with a character in it (Bernie and Clyde, after their attack). How would you imagine other connections between stories might be formed?

***A Friend’s Advice***:

The daughter is a very quiet and accepting character. How does her passivity affect the story? What might be different had she been more aggressive or outraged?

The narrator feels pressure from Adams to confront the teacher and his daughter. After that, Adams divulges the affair with the narrator’s wife. How much of the anger and betrayal the narrator then feels is in part due to his regret in having been influenced by Adams to confront the daughter’s teacher?

Why do you think the story is set in the Senior Center of City U? What role does this play or not play in how the narrator views aging?

***Roger’s Reason:***

Roger dismisses Balzir as a “shit” upon learning his true motives. After we learn Roger’s thoughts upon first seeing Ruby, how does your view of Roger as a person change?

Roger is appalled that Balzir is suddenly leaving his girlfriend. He was suddenly left by his girlfriend, Eva. How much of Roger’s outrage at Balzir is really towards Eva?

Why does Roger suggest Ruby change the cap’s direction? What does this signify?

***Occupy:***

What do you think is the role of the roommate, Jill, in the story? Why does her behavior in particular lead to a bonding moment between the narrator and his father?

What might the significance be of her reciting a speech from Buried Child, a play about a highly dysfunctional family dynamic, to a father and son with a strained familial relationship themselves?

The narrator lists a broad array of social justice causes he believes in fighting for, then describes how he soon moves into the background of the Occupy movement. How invested in specific social justice causes do you believe the narrator to be?

What can we assume about the father’s politics? What might the narrator not be telling us about his father’s views?

The father and son in Occupy eventually grow comfortable with one another, despite their very clear differences in personality, and the absence of the mother. How different do you suppose the father and son are from each other, aside from how different they seem to be on the surface?

***Moroccan Roll:***

Why do you think the German girls decided to carry out this unconventional “joke”? Especially after a minor offense like the narrator’s yawn?

Why does the narrator take such pleasure in keeping this secret from the other chaperones?

What does Thelma mean when she says to the narrator at the end, “Is it really that small?” Why does the secret to her amount to such a big betrayal?

Why does the narrator in Moroccan Roll refuse to tell Thelma about the German girls’ notes? What does he gain from harboring that secret?

Does Jack’s relationship with the German girls resemble a friendship towards the end of the story?

***Slam Matters:***

Within the story, Alfie’s romantic interests in Maddie are very apparent. How might the story have been different, or how would Alfie’s life have changed or not changed, had he only viewed her as a friend?

In Slam Matters, why is Maddie so appalled at the idea that Alfie has decided his newfound path in life based on their slam project? Why is the AP English teacher’s point of view so detrimental to her motivation, and why does she later choose to mock the gym teacher, despite his clear support of her, when she talks to Alfie?

Why does Maddie repeatedly brush off earnest compliments, whether from Alfie or the gym teacher she early on dismisses as a “deadbeat”? What is the particular significance of a compliment from Ms. Huggins?

Maddie and Alfie have had very different backgrounds and upbringings. How do you think their dynamic might have been different had they been more similar in that sense?

***Never Again***

The narrator doesn’t mention very much about his actual involvement with City U. What kind of teacher do you suppose he is? Why does he want to be a teacher?

How reliable do you believe the narrator to be throughout the story?

Notice how the narrator talks about and treats the women in his life, Eunice and Chloe. Aside from the adultery, what does this say about his personality?

By the story’s end, how much do you feel the narrator is repressing? How do you believe the final event will affect his life and persona, if the story were to continue?

In Never Again, the first person narrator is unreliable. How do the other first person narrators compare and contrast with this one? What might they be leaving out or refusing to tell?

***Ernie on the Loose:***

Why is Daisy as an individual such a driving force for Ernie to change directions in life? Why does he feel comfortable telling her about his life?

Why does Myrna feel confident or comfortable sending Ernie into a potentially risky and dangerous situation with Fletcher?

Why is Fletcher so confident that Ernie is in fact making the right decision, Ernie having just met Daisy?

***The Foreign Guy:***

How much do you feel Nimish’s love for the Cubs is performative? Is his wife right in her assessment, do you believe?

Why is Nimish so confident that his wife will get over her anger at him, after his outburst?

Why does the strong connection form between Nimish and the girl? Why does she begin taking pictures of herself? Why do you think her name isn’t mentioned?

***The Super:***

The final story is unique in that it’s the superintendent narrator speaking directly to the professor. The reader gleans a few details about the superintendent from his rant. How might the professor’s narration sound? How might he or a third person narrator describe or write this superintendent?

***Allie’s Big Pic ?’s***

Where do the friendships between men differ from those between men and women? Why do men in friendships with women want a deeper connection?

What do all of the different friendships in the stories have in common? How alike are the different members of each friendship?

There are a few friendships within the stories that become strained or fall apart. When the people in these various relationships reconnect, how do these reconnections compare with each other? How do they contrast?

Characters in recovery for addiction recur in the stories. How would you compare their newfound life goals upon entering City U, whether as a teacher or a student?

Every story centers around a male voice. How might a female character in any of the stories, whether Yolanda in Ask Clarence, or Maddie in Slam Matters, change the perspective of the story? How might a female character handle these scenarios?

Do you think any of the stories has a traditionally “happy” ending? Why or why not? What might a “happy” ending look like for certain stories with darker turns?

Some characters make impulsive choices based on meeting a girl, or witnessing the Cubs win the 2016 World Series. To what extent to the individual events actually motivate characters to act on impulse?

What did you like best about this book?

What did you like least about this book?

What other books did this remind you of?

Which characters in the book did you like best?

Which characters did you like least?

Which character in the book would you most like to meet? What would you say to them? Who did you relate to the most/least?

Did the characters seem believable to you? Did they remind you of anyone? Did you like them? Did you approve of their decisions and behavior?

Did the book’s pace seem too fast/too slow/just right?

Which scene has stuck with you the most?

What did you think of the writing?

What are you having the most trouble imagining and can’t wrap your head around?

What were the main points you think the author was trying to make?

Did you notice any symbolism?

Were you satisfied or disappointed with how the stories ended?

Was anything left unresolved or ambiguous?

How do you picture the characters’ lives after the end of the stories?

What did you think of the book’s length? If it’s too long, what would you cut? If too short, what would you add?

What do you think of the book’s title? How does it relate to the book’s contents? What other title might you choose?

What do you think of the book’s cover? How well does it convey what the book is about?

What do you think the author’s purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was he or she trying to get across?

How original and unique was this book?

Did this book seem realistic?

How well do you think the author built the world in the book?

Pretend you’re the author’s editor. What notes would you give them?

What feelings did this book evoke for you?

Share a favorite quote from the book. Why did this quote stand out?

If you were making a movie of this book, who would you cast?

What songs does this book make you think of? Create a book group playlist together!

What artist would you choose to illustrate this book? What kinds of illustrations would you include?

Which places in the book would you most like to visit?

If you could hear one of the stories from another person’s point of view, who would you choose?

Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?

If you got the chance to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?