



Book Club Discussion Guide



***THE MIDNIGHT MAN* (a novel)**

384 Pages

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David Eric Tomlinson is available to discuss his novel with your book club, either in person or via Skype.

Visit www.DavidEricTomlinson.com to schedule an author appearance.

1. Over the course of this novel, each of the five main characters changes in some dramatic way. Cecil Porter, for example, comes to terms with his bigotry, and learns to ask for help from his friends and loved ones. As the story progresses, in what ways do the other characters grow? Do they do it alone, or does someone else facilitate the evolution?
2. Becca Porter volunteers at a battered women's shelter. How do the other characters involve themselves within the community? What are they hoping to achieve? Which of these contributions has the most impact? Did you agree or disagree with the ways in which the characters attempt to influence matters of business, politics, or faith? Why?
3. Consider the theme of forgiveness. "If the past is *inside* of you, Aura, that means you control it," Nate says. "You can change your understanding of it, your feelings about it, your relationship with it. Anytime you decide to. Anger, hate, resentment ... these things are a prison." Do you think pastor Nate is correct? Is true forgiveness possible? And is the act of forgiveness more beneficial to the perpetrator, or the victim, of a crime? Why?

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4. Billy Grimes isn't the only criminal in this novel. How are Billy's crimes different from those committed by OJ Simpson, Mark Fuhrman, Bob Macy, Jane Barrett, Willa Busby, Timothy McVeigh, Carl Jefferson, Ben Porter, or even Dean Goodnight? How did you feel about capital punishment before reading this novel? Did you learn anything new about the death penalty? Did your opinions change? If a prosecutor is absolutely positive that a defendant is guilty, do you believe that manufacturing evidence or lying under oath, to ensure a conviction, is ever justified? Do you think Dean Goodnight would want to see Timothy McVeigh put to death?
5. "Conversation's not a competition," Cecil says to his brother. "That's what the loser always says," Ben replies. How do the characters in this novel use language to achieve specific goals? Identify instances of non-verbal communication between characters. Is it effective? How is persuasion different from communication? What is the point of the "I spy" competition between the father and his daughter in chapter thirty-three?
6. "Umbrella," Aura says to Becca, "means we're a team. And they are. A team, Becca thinks, and a family." How are the themes of teamwork and family juxtaposed throughout this novel? What do you think the author is trying to say? Can you identify other paired themes within text?
7. Becca has a recurring daydream about a red door, closing. What do you think doors symbolize in this story? Identify other symbols and discuss the scenes in which they appear.
8. Not all of these characters are sympathetic. Both Ben and Cecil Porter, for example, use emotionally-charged racial slurs in casual conversation. Does this make it more difficult to empathize with their personal or moral struggles? Does a character need to be sympathetic to be interesting? Or heroic? Why?
9. Imagine that someone is writing a novel about your life. Describe your character arc. What are the main obstacles between you and your goal? Are these obstacles financial, psychological, physical, intellectual, philosophical? How might your character need to adapt in order to overcome them? Have you ever changed your mind about a strongly-held belief or bias? If not, imagine and describe the circumstances which might cause you to reevaluate one of your core principles.
10. Choctaw storytelling involves stepping back in time and telling a kind of forward-looking prophecy, reconciling the past with the present moment. Consider the novel's four-part structure and eventual climax. Identify clues or motifs which connect the earlier chapters of the story to its ending. What do you think the author is trying to say about the political or social circumstances that give rise to domestic terrorism?
11. Discuss the portrayal of the various ethnicities in this novel. How did the author convey race or class differences? What stereotypes did he rely on? Should a novelist's ethnicity limit what he or she can write? How would Aura answer that same question? How would Becca, Dean, or Cecil?
12. "Amen doesn't have to mean we've reached the end," Past Nate says to Opal Jefferson. "Sometimes it means we're just getting started." Consider the ending of THE MIDNIGHT MAN. What do you think will happen to these characters five, ten, or even twenty years later? How would Cecil Porter and Aura Jefferson, for example, react to witnessing a black man become President of the United States, or to current tensions between the police and people of color? How might contemporary political developments affect the beliefs, motivations, and relationships of the characters?