

FLORIDA PALMS Reading Group Guide

This reading group guide for *Florida Palms* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club experience. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting topics for discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

Please be aware that this discussion guide will contain spoilers!

Introduction

The small towns along the Space Coast of Florida are like many others in America, and the travails Eddy and Cueball face are similar to those difficulties affecting many young people today. Common themes include issues of class and economics, drug and alcohol abuse, family fissures and questions of identity, and a sense that the promises of education and opportunity afforded older generations are no longer within their grasp. Yet among the struggle we find moments of inspiration, friendship, and true connection. Written in a personal, lyrical style, *Florida Palms* brings a dramatic eye and whip smart action to a tale of drug-running youths fighting for their lives.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

- 1) “It was survival-living dressed up as culture...” *Florida Palms* portrays working-class people eking out a tough existence in a small Space Coast town during the Great Recession. How does the economic instability of the region shape the characters’ moral choices, their relationships, and their sense of purpose as they struggle to make ends meet?
- 2) The book begins just after Eddy and Cueball graduate high school and begin working for Bird’s moving company. What futures are the boys imagining for themselves? What futures did you imagine for yourself when you graduated high school? What kind of lives do you think await young people like Cueball and Eddy today?
- 3) “We had something once...a code.” How does Del Ray’s lament define the outlaw identity? What did he feel was missing?
- 4) What bound these characters together most strongly at the beginning of the book—loyalty, love, proximity, shared morals, necessity, a sense of survival, or fear? Did this change by the end, and if so, for whom and how?
- 5) Family ties in *Florida Palms* are often fractured and imperfect; the same can be said for other personal bonds requiring fraught allegiances. How did Eddy’s difficult relationship with his mother and Cueball’s deeply flawed relationship with his father shape their lives and play out in later relationships?
- 6) Drugs and alcohol pervade the novel—are they used as forms of escapism, rebellion, coping, self-destruction? How does Pan portray the thin line between euphoria and ruin?

7) How did the lyrical descriptions of Florida's landscape help develop the novel's mood and atmosphere? Did this impact your reading of certain passages? Would you describe Florida as a character itself?

8) Del Ray delivered a few philosophical monologues in the book. Did you read these passages as moments of wisdom, self-mythology, delusion? Which passages or speeches lingered with you the most, and why?

9) What role did humor play in humanizing these morally gray characters?

10) Violence permeates the novel, from backwoods executions to Gumby's brutal takedown of several characters. How does the casual presence of violence shape the atmosphere of Palm Bay? Were there moments you found especially unsettling or illuminating? Analyze how violence escalates in the novel—when is it depicted as senseless, ritualized, necessary, or redemptive?

11) Discuss how ideas surrounding masculinity were investigated in the rendering of the Armstrong Crew. Were the elder club leaders more mentors or manipulators? How does Pan balance sympathy for these characters with critiques of them?

12) Discuss how Eddy evolves across the five parts of the novel—from drifting son to reluctant participant to regime crony to forced outsider. Locate the moments where we witness the transformations happen—are these moments erosions of Eddy's moral compass or necessary obstacles on his journey into manhood?

13) In an earlier conversation, Gin said she believed "people never changed," while Eddy thought people "eventually find their way." Who do you think was proven right in the context of this narrative?

14) In the end, what does *Florida Palms* seem to say about power structures and capitalism? Do any characters successfully escape their origins? Do they succeed in finding themselves in a better position than before?

15) Which character arc or moment in the book affected you most? Did the ending leave you with a sense of closure, unease, or something else?