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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Ordinary Grace by William Kent Krueger

Summary

“That was it. That was all of it. A grace so ordinary there was no reason at all to remember it. Yet I have never across the forty years since it was spoken forgotten a single word.”

New Bremen, Minnesota, 1961. The Twins were playing their debut season, ice-cold root beers were selling out at the soda counter of Halderson’s Drugstore, and *Hot Stuff* comic books were a mainstay on every barbershop magazine rack. It was a time of innocence and hope for a country with a new, young president. But for thirteen-year-old Frank Drum it was a grim summer in which death visited frequently and assumed many forms. Accident. Nature. Suicide. Murder.

Frank begins the season preoccupied with the concerns of any teenage boy, but when tragedy unexpectedly strikes his family— which includes his Methodist minister father; his passionate, artistic mother; Juilliard-bound older sister; and wise-beyond-his-years kid brother— he finds himself thrust into an adult world full of secrets, lies, adultery, and betrayal, suddenly called upon to demonstrate a maturity and gumption beyond his years.

Told from Frank’s perspective forty years after that fateful summer, *Ordinary Grace* is a brilliantly moving account of a boy standing at the door of his young manhood, trying to understand a world that seems to be falling apart around him. It is an unforgettable novel about discovering the terrible price of wisdom and the enduring grace of God.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the final revelation of Ariel’s whereabouts. Had you guessed correctly?
2. Much of Frank and Jake’s knowledge comes from overhearing and snooping. Which instance of eavesdropping provided them with the heaviest, most important information? Is there a particular overheard conversation that led most directly to the loss of their childhood innocence?
3. Along those same lines, in what ways have the two boys been transformed by story’s end?
4. Who is ultimately responsible for the death of Karl Brandt?

5. A number of characters carry secrets that eventually come to light. Was there a certain catharsis once they were able to unload the truth? Did it do them any good? Consider especially Frank's father, whose deeds in the war remained a mystery. Is there some merit to carrying the burden of a secret alone?
6. Though the title of the novel refers to a particular "ordinary grace," what other small graces did you find in the book?
7. Why does Ruth leave her family? Do you think she was truly mad at Nathan? At God? Discuss the ways in which she and the other characters deal with their grief over Ariel.
8. Do you agree with Frank's insight in the epilogue that, "there is no such thing as a true event?" What makes a story real? How do we deal with varying perspectives and reflections of history?
9. Do you think Frank had a responsibility to tell Emil about Lise? Was there merit to Jake's argument that her fenced-in estate was prison enough?
10. Do you forgive Emil for his moment of indiscretion? Is he in some way to blame for everything that happened in New Bremen?
11. Frank and Jake often make a case to come along to the sheriff's office, crime scenes, and pivotal confrontations during the upheaval in New Bremen. Should they have been allowed to bear witness to these things? Should children be shielded from the occasional darkness of adult life?
12. What do you make of Gus? Is he in some ways the backbone (though not a true relative) of the Drum family?
13. Do you agree with the sentiment of the older Warren Redstone? Is it true that the departed are never far from us?

Summary from Goodreads.com
Discussion Questions from <https://williamkentkrueger.com>