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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Snapper by Brian Kimberling

Summary

A great, hilarious new voice in fiction: the poignant, all-too-human recollections of an affable bird researcher in the Indiana backwater as he goes through a disastrous yet heartening love affair with the place and its people.

Nathan Lochmueller studies birds, earning just enough money to live on. He drives a glitter-festooned truck, the Gypsy Moth, and he is in love with Lola, a woman so free-spirited and mysterious she can break a man's heart with a sigh or a shrug.

Around them swirls a remarkable cast of characters: the proprietor of Fast Eddie's Burgers & Beer, the genius behind "Thong Thursdays"; Uncle Dart, a Texan who brings his swagger to Indiana with profound and nearly devastating results; a snapping turtle with a taste for thumbs; a German shepherd who howls backup vocals; and the very charismatic state of Indiana itself.

And at the center of it all is Nathan, creeping through the forest to observe the birds he loves and coming to terms with the accidental turns his life has taken. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. The book opens with "I got my job by accident." How does this set the tone of the book? Does it describe the path of Nathan's life?
2. *Snapper* revolves around bird watching. What part do animals play in the book? How do animals help to move the story and define the characters? In what way are they characters themselves?
3. Several of the stories feature Lola. Is Nathan's infatuation with Lola affected by her unavailability? Does Nathan love Lola? How do Nathan's other relationships compare to his with Lola?
4. How does Nathan treat his relationships? Does he have trouble committing to anything? To anyone?
5. Kimberling references Peter Taylor, a loyal Tennessee native, and Nathan is clearly from Indiana. How much are the main characters defined by their home states? If Dart and Loretta represent Texas, then how do they differ from the characters from Indiana?

Discussion Questions from <http://www.litlovers.com>



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6. The author also reference to Katherine Anne Porter, whose writing deals with topics like justice, betrayal, and the unforgiving nature of humans. How are these topics handled in the story?
7. Uncle Dart squares off with the Klan yet displays his own prejudices. Is this solely to bother Nathan? At what point is a joke to be taken seriously? Or is it simply wrong to joke about certain topics?
8. Nathan claims to “wax wroth with Darcy” yet seldom speaks with anger or indignity. Does he believe he has stronger convictions than he shows? Does he take an active or passive approach? How does his taste in literature match his ideals and represent his values?
9. This book deals with tolerance on many different levels and on many topics. How much can be overlooked?
10. Nathan parts ways with John at the end of chapter IV. Why do long friendships end or fail to be rekindled? Darren is obviously not an ideal roommate, but is allowed to stay until he hurts Nathan. When does the line get crossed with friends?
11. What can be taken from Nathan’s encounter with Maud and Ernie? Why were they offended? They welcome all to their diner. Are they choosing to turn a blind eye unless forced to do otherwise?
12. Nathan has encounters with veterans. Once in the woods, and another in the vet center. Compare the two encounters with each other and with Nathan’s experience in Outward Bound. How do these three experiences complement each other? How do they differ?
13. Have you tried, a la Ernest Hemingway, to write a story in six words? How long does a story need to be? Is this a story collection or a novel? What is the difference? How important is a plotline in telling a story? Is it more satisfying to have one or more enjoyable to be free of the bounds of the structure?
14. Lola has clearly changed in Nathan’s eyes later in the story. How has she changed? How has Nathan changed? Do they have the same values now as in their youth?
15. Nathan compares headlights and traffic lights to his patch of woods. He laments, “Oh, people. My people” (page 210). Would Nathan and Shane as young men stop to pick up an older Nathan waving his arms in the middle of the road?
16. Why is the book entitled Snapper?(Questions issued by publisher.)