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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **His Bloody Project** by Graeme Macrae Burnet

#### Summary

A brutal triple murder in a remote Scottish farming community in 1869 leads to the arrest of seventeen-year-old Roderick Macrae.

There is no question that Macrae committed this terrible act. What would lead such a shy and intelligent boy down this bloody path? And will he hang for his crime?

Presented as a collection of documents discovered by the author, *His Bloody Project* opens with a series of police statements taken from the villagers of Culdie, Ross-shire. They offer conflicting impressions of the accused; one interviewee recalls Macrae as a gentle and quiet child, while another details him as evil and wicked.

Chief among the papers is Roderick Macrae's own memoirs where he outlines the series of events leading up to the murder in eloquent and affectless prose. There follow medical reports, psychological evaluations, a courtroom transcript from the trial, and other documents that throw both Macrae's motive and his sanity into question.

Graeme Macrae Burnet's multilayered narrative—centered around an unreliable narrator—will keep the reader guessing to the very end. *His Bloody Project* is a deeply imagined crime novel that is both thrilling and luridly entertaining from an exceptional new voice. (From the publisher.)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Roddy Macrae's fate at trial hinges on the question of his sanity. How has our understanding of insanity changed since Victorian times?
2. What do you think Roddy's true motivations for the murders are? To what extent do you accept his version of events?
3. What roles do the various secondary characters – Lachlan Mackenzie, Jetta, John Macrae, Flora Mackenzie – play in the lead-up to Roddy's murders?

4. The novel is presented as a series of ‘found documents’. How does this format affect your understanding of the characters and story?
5. The novel explores the social hierarchy of the Scottish Highlands in the nineteenth century. What impact do these structures have on the lives and actions of the characters?
6. What role is played in the novel by religious and other superstitious beliefs?

Discussion Questions from <http://themanbookerprize.com>.