

A Reading Group Guide for John Siddique's 'Recital – An Almanac'

1. Discuss why modern poetry is not read more often in Reading Groups. Is there a sense of fear in general readers regarding poetry? John Siddique's work aims at cutting through the reluctance in readers to poetry, how do you think his work does that? Are the themes of Recital relevant to your readership? Were you surprised by the content?
2. One of the main things that is said about Recital is that it is a national book. Discuss issues of national representation in literature. Is there such a thing as the Great British Novel? Take a look at the sequence 'Inside,' about the London Bombings. Initially John was worried about publishing these pieces as no one was talking openly about the nature of our society. How free do you think we are to examine the edges of society? As it has always been part of the poet's job to be the outsider, please consider other writers you feel who are making this type of contribution.
3. Recital is constructed around the thirteen full moons of the year, and forms a chronology if you read it from beginning to end, how is the book different if you read it this way as opposed to dipping in and out on random poems.
4. The subject of fatherhood is very large in Recital, many of these poems seem very personal, discuss how personal writing of this kind can lead you back to reflect on your own experience.
5. Take a look at the poem 'Other People's Children.' It is a poem about being a step-parent; very little is written about this subject, and especially so by men, what other things would you like to read about that you rarely see?
6. Recital has been referred to as a post-racial book. Please consider how race is often represented in literature. John Siddique and his writing by his heritage draw on a multitude of cultural sources, why do you think he chooses to represent Britain in such a complex way.
7. Why do you think Siddique used the cyclical approach to the year? The sea, and the mundane but real happenings of life represent other cycles in the book, what do you think he is trying to say with all this movement within the text?
8. A number of the poems rely on mythic elements drawn from British, Japanese and Chinese systems, why do you think Siddique has used such colouring in his collection when writing a modern book about Britain. What is the importance of myth today?
9. The poems in Recital offer a moving, highly original perspective on the clash of cultural traditions within Siddique's own family. How does the sense of displacement felt by the poet speak of Britain today? What accommodations does the poet make in order to make up for the cultural misunderstandings of the past? Is it possible to be more than your heritage?
10. Do you have a favourite poem in the book? Please discuss your choices with your group.
11. How can you encourage other reading groups to take a look at poetry?

Suggested Reading: Philip Larkin – The Whitsun Weddings, Paul Auster – The Invention of Solitude, Sharon Olds - The Wellspring, Manto – Short Stories, Robert Graves – The White Goddess, ee cummings – collected poems, Pablo Neruda – Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair.

More On John Siddique's Books at www.johnsiddique.co.uk