

A Reading Group Guide for *Full Blood* by John Siddique

1. What does the title *Full Blood* mean to you? What do you think it means to the poet? How might a person of mixed parentage and nationality claim his own “full blood”? What poem in the book best illustrates for you the meaning of “full blood”, and why?
2. What are the central themes of the collection?
3. *Full Blood* is divided into a Prologue that is followed by four main sections: Via Negativa, Reclaiming the Body, The Tree of Life, and Xibulba. Did you notice these categories? What would you say is their purpose? How do they help you to understand a particular poem in a section or illuminate the themes of the collection as a whole?
4. What is the purpose of including epigraphs or quotations before each section of the collection?
5. The Prologue comprises John’s poem “Every Atom”, the opening three lines of which underscore the idea of “relationship”. What are the different kinds of relationships, both broadly and specifically, described in the poem? How do the different relationships play out throughout the collection? What poems show the strength of relationship? Which ones describe how relationships are broken?
6. Toward the end of “Every Atom” the poet writes, “We place our lives together and they mean something / if we choose them to.” What is the importance of that word “if”? What are some other ways the poet communicates his concept of choice in *Full Blood*?
7. *Full Blood* is written in first-person narrative. Why do you think a poet like John Siddique uses “I” and “we”? Do you believe the poet and the narrator of the poems are one and the same? Why or why not?
8. In “Thirst”, the lines “Imagine thirst without knowing water” and “Imagine love without love” are alternated at the end of the stanzas. For what reason(s) does the poet use repetition here and elsewhere in *Full Blood*?
9. Some of the poems are explicit in describing sex and love-making (there is a distinction that you might want to discuss). Why is explicit language necessary? What feelings arise or thoughts come to mind when such language appears in a poem?

10. "The Knife" is a series of five linked poems. Discuss how these poems link back to the notions of "full blood" and "relationship". How does the violence revealed in this series relate to the line in "Thirst" that implores "Imagine love without love"?
11. What are some of the ways that various poems convey dis-connection and loss to readers?
12. In the first section John includes two poems, both of which are titled "One Hundred". What are these poems about? What is the importance of naming here? Why, in listing names, do you think the poet put a period at the end of each name, and how does the poet's use of such punctuation relate to the collection's larger theme of relationship? What is the relationship of the first poem, listing names in English, to the second, listing names we might not know how to pronounce? What emotion arose when you came to the second "One Hundred" poem and saw names like "Amin" and "Muhammad"? Did you continue reading? Why or why not? What did you notice about the first set of names that is not true of the second?
13. The "One Hundred" poems are just one example of the poet as political commentator. In what other poems, and how, does John Siddique reveal his political leanings? Do you think politics is an appropriate theme for poetry? Why or why not?
14. The last section of the collection is titled "Xibulba", which, it is believed, is a place to which souls migrate after death. How would you describe this place "Xibulba" as revealed in the poems in this section? Is it a single "place", a country, a state of mind, a place to which we all can aspire to go? What is it that we're seeking that we can find in "Xibulba" but not necessarily on the planet we inhabit? Do you believe it is possible to create a "Xibulba" on earth? How do we do that?
15. Would you agree that *Full Blood* is ultimately a collection about love? How do the various manifestations of love differ as the reader progresses through the collection?
16. Would you call *Full Blood* a "religious" or "spiritual" book? What poems would you cite to support your opinion?

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