

# In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

Adapted from MacMillan Publishing



## *The Summer that Melted Everything*

by Tiffany McDaniel

This debut novel centers on Fielding Bliss in the summer of 1984, the year a heat wave scorched Breathed, Ohio, and Fielding became friends with the devil.

1. Sal is a complicated character: he doesn't talk like a normal thirteen-year-old boy, and he often seems to know things he shouldn't, but is he really the devil? What do you think? If not, why does he claim to be?
2. Tiffany McDaniel uses this novel and the characters in it to explore the meanings of, and to overturn our assumptions about, good and evil. Did any part of the story have a personal impact on you, in terms of questioning your own assumptions about the world?
3. The names throughout the novel (Autopsy, Fielding, Elohim, Dresden, etc.) are unusual. Why do you think the author chose them, and do you think they add anything to the narrative? Do any stick out to you in particular?
4. The events of the summer of 1984 have haunted Fielding for seventy years. Do you think the kind of trauma he experienced, and inflicted, is something you can ever really get over? Why do you think it's crippled him so completely?
5. Horrible things happen to a lot of people in this book—Otis & Dovey, Dresden, Grand—some more innocent than others. Are their tragedies random or do they serve some kind of purpose in the story? Grand's death, in particular, acts as a catalyst for the events that follow, but would Elohim's group of followers have done the same thing if he had lived? What purpose does tragedy serve in fiction for readers in general, and for you personally?
6. Family is at the heart of this novel. What does it say about the Bliss family that they accepted the so-called devil into their home and into the fold of their family? How did family love come to define the relationships throughout the novel?
7. Discuss Fielding, Grand, and Sal. How was their relationship defined? In particular, how did you feel about the relationship between Grand and Fielding, and how did their sibling connection change over the course of the novel? How did Sal's presence affect, or alter that sibling relationship?
8. Talk about mob mentality and how individual thought can be controlled by the collective whole. In this thinking, what parallels exist between *The Summer That Melted Everything* and George Orwell's novel *1984*?
9. Who do we invite when we invite the devil? And how was the "devil" present in the novel? What does the book say about the dichotomy of good and evil? More importantly, what does the novel say about the gray area in between good and bad? How did the relationship between Sal and Elohim and the representations of their characters contribute to that?
10. This book has a lot of moments in it where the characters further their own downfall and pain. Why is it important to tell stories like this? How does exploring these issues in fiction help with understanding what is happening in the real world?

# NEXT MONTH



## ***Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved***

by Kate Bowler

Bowler shares her battle with cancer in an account populated with friends, mega-church preachers, relatives, and doctors. Bowler offers up irreverent, hard-won observations on dying and the ways it has taught her to live.