

ETNA

a novel



PAUL YOON

Reading Group Guide

This reading group guide for ETNA includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.



INTRODUCTION

Set in a fictional war-torn country, this story follows Etna, a former military dog. After years of a brutal war, he makes the quiet choice to leave behind the soldiers he once served in search of home, driven by the fragile hope that he might still belong there.

A gripping odyssey unfolds, seen through Etna's eyes, as he traverses the ravaged landscape. Along the way, he encounters humans and animals alike who are trying to rebuild their lives. This powerful novel asks the question: In the absence of home, what does it mean to live—and how can trust be rebuilt after profound loss?

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This story is told through Etna's eyes. How does the perspective of a dog shape the story? What language and sensory details might have been different if it were from the perspective of a human?
2. Etna is an odyssey, in the sense that it depicts a journey home. What about this classic form is transmuted by this story?
3. Why do you think the two epigraphs were chosen? Revisiting them now after finishing the story, do they hold a different resonance?
4. Soojin is the only human who can understand Etna. What does this tell you about her character? Why do you think she possesses this special understanding?
5. Animals seem to have no such language barriers with one another—Etna speaks with a donkey, a cat, a bird, and with other dogs. Why do you think Yoon made this creative choice? How does communication create closeness between some characters and distance between others?
6. Which encounters of Etna's did you find the most moving? Why?
7. This war unfolds in a fictional, present-day country. Why do you think Yoon chose to fictionalize the country instead of choosing one we know?
8. As Etna follows the train tracks to the city, he says, "I was aware, with a new intensity, of my aloneness" (68). How does loneliness and isolation shape Etna's journey? How does this inform the importance of pack, of community, and of home?
9. What is your interpretation of the ending?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Write a short story from the perspective of an animal. How does this transform the way you portray the world?
2. Find a community, locally or abroad, working to rebuild after conflict. What are ways you can help? How can your voice and your perspective provide support?
3. Explore Paul Yoon's earlier works: *The Hive* and *the Honey*, *Snow Hunters*, *Run Me to Earth*, *The Mountain*, and *Once the Shore*. What are some common themes you can find in these stories?
4. This book was inspired by the novel *King* by John Berger. Read this book and see what parts might have served as inspiration for Etna.