



# The Spark and The Drive

Wayne Harrison

ISBN: 978-1-250-04124-1 \* Hardcover \* St. Martin's Press \* July 2014

## READING GROUP GUIDE

### About the book:

Justin Bailey is seventeen when he arrives at the shop of legendary muscle car mechanic Nick Campbell. Anguished and out of place among the students at his rural Connecticut high school, Justin finds in Nick, his captivating wife Mary Ann, and their world of miraculous machines the sense of family he has struggled to find at home.

But when Nick and Mary Ann's lives are struck by tragedy, Justin's own world is upended. Suddenly Nick, once celebrated for his mechanical genius, has lost his touch. Mary Ann, once tender and compassionate to her husband, has turned distant. As Justin tries to prop up his suffering mentor, he finds himself drawn toward the man's grieving wife. Torn apart by feelings of betrayal, Justin must choose between the man he admires more than his own father and the woman he loves.

A poignant and fiercely original debut, with moments of fast-paced suspense, *The Spark and The Drive* is the unforgettable story of a young man forced to make an impossible decision—no matter the consequences.

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Justin's relationship to his father inform his sense of manhood?
2. Describe Out of the Hole Automotive. Would you feel comfortable having your car worked on there? How do you think such a shop stay in business?
3. What do muscle cars symbolize to Justin, Nick, Bobby and Ray, and Mary Ann?



4. How does Justin's relationship with Bobby and the scene with Eve and Dennis influence Justin's sense of right and wrong?
5. What are some of the similarities between Ray and Bobby as mechanics? In what ways are Justin and, later, Rod a different breed, and how does Nick bridge the gap between mechanics and technicians?
6. What qualities in Justin are attractive to Mary Ann? What does he offer her that is missing from her life?
7. Discuss the symbolism of Holy Land, USA in relation to the events of the novel.
8. Describe Justin's relationship with April. What are the practical and more latent reasons why he asks Mary Ann to baby sit her on a regular basis?
9. Discuss Nick's faith in technology. In what ways does it set him apart from other muscle car mechanics, and in what ways does it stunt him? (Consider his ideas about time machines.)
10. How does Justin feel about his mother's drinking? Do his attitude change in the course of the book?
11. How would you describe the central problem of Nick and Mary Ann's marriage? What might Nick have done to change things? What might Mary Ann have done?
12. Discuss themes of communication in the novel. What does Mary Ann mean when she says of Nick, "He should have had people around him and he had machines"?
13. What does racing the Corvette represent to Justin? What does it represent to Nick?
14. What motivates Justin to frame Nick?



15. Discuss the numerous betrayals dramatized in the novel. Consider the central betrayal of Nick, and also the more subtle betrayals of Bobby, April, Carol and even Justin. How are the cycles broken?

**About the author:**

WAYNE HARRISON is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop whose stories have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *McSweeney's*, *Ploughshares*, and *Narrative Magazine*. One of his stories was selected for *Best American Short Stories 2010* and his fiction has been featured on NPR's *All Things Considered*. His short story collection *Wrench* was a finalist for the Iowa Book Award, the Serena McDonald Kennedy Award, and the Spokane Prize. He teaches writing at Oregon State University.

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