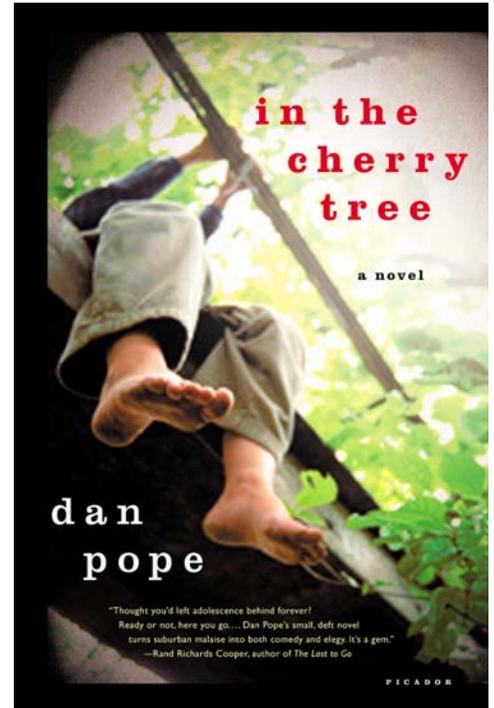


READING GROUP GUIDE

In the Cherry Tree A Novel

by *Dan Pope*

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *In the Cherry Tree* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *In the Cherry Tree*.

About the Book

It's a suburban summer in the Seventies. Twelve years old and full of boundless curiosity, Timmy lives in an ever-expanding realm of record collections (of which Elton John is king), neighborhood bullies (of which Frankie DiLorenzo rules) best friends and backyard football. But 1974 is the summer that changes everything. An intruder will break into his tree house. Timmy will lose a friend, discover sex, and learn the darker, more lasting secrets of his own household. Featuring one of the most remarkable child narrators to come along in recent years, *In the Cherry Tree* is the achievement of a stunning new voice in American fiction, an addictively clever and appealing novel of our universal coming of age.

Praise

“*In the Cherry Tree* combines the sweet earnestness of youth with the slightly savage lust of late male adolescence. This book is a fort—climb up and stay a while.”—Anthony Swofford, author of *Jarhead*

”Thought you’d left adolescence behind forever? Ready or not, here you go. Dan Pope’s small, deft novel turns suburban malaise into both comedy and elegy. It’s a gem.”—Ran Richards Copper, author of *The Last to Go*

“*In the Cherry Tree* is a running cannonball back into the swimming pool of 1970s childhood, perfectly capturing the warmth, detail, and self-assured confusion of what I didn’t realize I’d already forgotten about being a kid. Absolutely unpretentious, unsentimental, funny, and sad, it plunges you back into a world of dissolving families and dissolving childhoods, distilling in its spare prose the raw invigoration of simply being alive.”—Chris Ware, author of *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

“Dan Pope is a wonder. *In the Cherry Tree* tells the sad, hilarious truth about growing up. If you’ve ever loved, married, or given birth to a boy, you must read this book.”—Jennifer Haigh, author of *Mrs. Kimble*

“Dan Pope’s novel doesn’t capture the world of twelve-year-old boys in the 1970s so much as it liberates it. Filled with music, cars, obtuse older siblings, parents who are struggling with their own demons, and (increasingly, tentatively) girls, *In the Cherry Tree* gets every nuance right—the alliances and rivalries, the exuberance and sorrow, but above all the brilliant mix of intelligence and unintelligence that characterizes preteen life.”—Ben Greenman, author of *Superbad*

“*In the Cherry Tree* is both a love song and a lament for lost childhood. Not only is it about days gone by, but more importantly it is about growing up and learning that the life we were so sure would one day be ours disappeared somewhere along the way and here we are with this one instead. I read this strong and vibrant book with a constant smile on my face.”—Jonathan Carroll, author of *The Wooden Sea*

About the Author

Dan Pope is a graduate of the Iowa Writer’s Workshop. Portions of *In the Cherry Tree* appeared in *McSweeney’s*, while other fiction has appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *Senandoah*, and *Iowa Review*. He lives in Connecticut.

Discussion Questions

1. At the start of *In The Cherry Tree*, we learn that the street where Timmy lives is part of a suburban track of land which used to be a terraced apple orchard. Some of the houses still

have apple trees, which drop crab apples onto the lawns. What do you think the apples trees, and for that matter, the cherry tree symbolizes, if anything? Why is Tiger not allowed to climb the tree? Why is Timmy upset when the raccoon goes up onto the highest branch? And why is he upset, later in the summer, when a murder of crows attacks the tree, rendering its branches bare?

2. Timmy enjoys making lists of his favorite movies, songs, and television shows. What is the significance of these cultural references, other than as signifiers of the time and place? Why are they important to Timmy? Why should they be important to us?
3. The Mom. The Dad. The Myra. The Device. The Station Wagon. The Green Machine. Etc. Why does Timmy refer to these people and things in such a manner? What does it say about his vision of the world? Additionally, how is the author's choice to withhold Timmy's last name related to his protagonist's vision of that world?
4. How do Timmy and Albert communicate? What's significant about the language that they use with each other?
5. Does Timmy behave, act, and think like a 12-year-old boy?
6. The Mom and The Dad don't get along very well. What sort of things do they fight about? In what ways are they different? Which of them do you feel yourself siding with during their battles? Does The Mom worry too much or does The Dad not worry enough?
7. Throughout the course of the summer, the neighboring Cosgrove family falls apart. Does the Cosgrove's crack-up in some ways mirror the events occurring in Timmy's house? In which ways are the families different? How does the Cosgrove's crack-up influence Timmy's father, if at all?
8. If *In the Cherry Tree* is a novel about the Seventies, what from this period does not appear? Why do you think the author has chosen to omit such details?
9. Timmy never, or rarely, tells us how he feels about the things he witnesses. Even so, does he change—does he mature—during the course of the summer? If so, which events spark a change in him? How do we know he's changed, since he doesn't really tell us his feelings?
10. At the end of the novel, Timmy seems to be looking out over a chasm as wide as the Snake River Canyon. He tells us, finally, that "anything was possible." What comes next for him, do you think? Will he retain the same sense of optimism he feels at the end of the book?

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