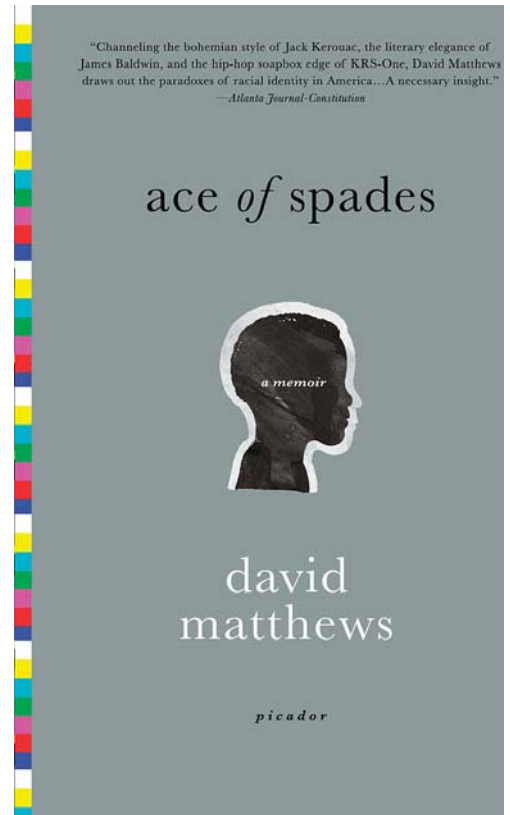


READING GROUP GUIDE

Ace of Spades *A Memoir*

by David Matthews

ISBN-10: 0-312-42631-3
ISBN-13: 9780312426316



About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Ace of Spades* 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 *Ace of Spades*.

About the Book

When David Matthews's mother abandoned him as an infant, she left him with white skin and the rumor that he might be half Jewish. For the next twenty years, he would be torn between his actual life as a black boy in the ghetto of 1980s Baltimore and a largely imagined world of white privilege.

While his father, a black activist who counted Malcolm X among his friends, worked long hours as managing editor at the Baltimore Afro-American, David spent his early years escaping

wicked-stepmother types and nursing an eleven-hour-a-day TV habit alongside his grandmother in her old-folks-home apartment. In Reagan-era America, there was no box marked "Other," no multiculturalism or self-serving political correctness, only a young boy's need to make it in a clearly segregated world where white meant "have" and black meant "have not." Without particular allegiance to either, David careened in and out of community college, dead-end jobs, his father's life, and girls' pants.

A bracing yet hilarious reinvention of the American story of passing, *Ace of Spades* marks the debut of an irresistible and fiercely original new voice.

Praise for *Ace of Spades*:

"Channeling the bohemian style of Jack Kerouac, the literary elegance of James Baldwin, and the hip-hop soapbox edge of KRS-One, David Matthews draws out the paradoxes of racial identity in America. Though it's no G-rated narrative, it's a necessary insight."--*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"A memoir with meaning, *Ace of Spades* is a story of self-deprecation and, ultimately, self-empowerment . . . His lifelong search and the book come to a conclusion that is wrenching and redemptive."--*USA Today*

"Stylish, astute . . . What *Ace of Spades* demonstrates so vividly is the conditional nature of racial identity as a lived experience."--*The New York Times*

"Matthews's admirable honesty and mostly fluid writing are enticing--and he doesn't bother with blame or self-pity. . . . It's a testament to his writing that, despite a tortured life chronicled over 300 pages, we want to know more."--Associated Press

"This is a loving portrait of a close relationship between a father and son, one slightly delayed by the fog of race."--*Booklist*

About the Author

David Matthews is a writer living in New York. He has appeared on *The Tavis Smiley Show* and the *CBS Sunday Morning Show*, and in *People* magazine.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does David admire his friend Stefan so much? Why doesn't Stefan "out" David when he passes for white? And why is Stefan able to seem so self-confident while David is not?
2. Discuss the influence Grandma Mae had on David.
3. Why does David ignore his father, Ralph, in the park? Should he have done so?

4. How did the father and the son moving to different neighborhoods alter David's life and his sense of himself?
5. How does the fact that David is half Jewish shape his self-image?
6. Would it have made a difference to David's life if Ralph had spent more time educating David on his black heritage? Why did Ralph not do so?
7. Is David a racist? To whom and in what way? If so, when does David first become aware of his own racism?
8. After the cross-burning incident, David decides that he isn't a racist but a "hater." What is the difference?
9. David briefly becomes radicalized when he finally embraces his black identity. Why is that?
10. When David is passing, does he do so out of cowardice, necessity, or convenience?
11. In the last chapter of the book, we learn what happened to David's mother, Robin. Do these revelations answer any of David's questions about his life and identity?
12. Who decides who is black, white, Jewish, or any ethnicity? Each individual, or society? What if the individual and society disagree?
13. Does David write about an America that you recognize?

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