

# READING GROUP GUIDE

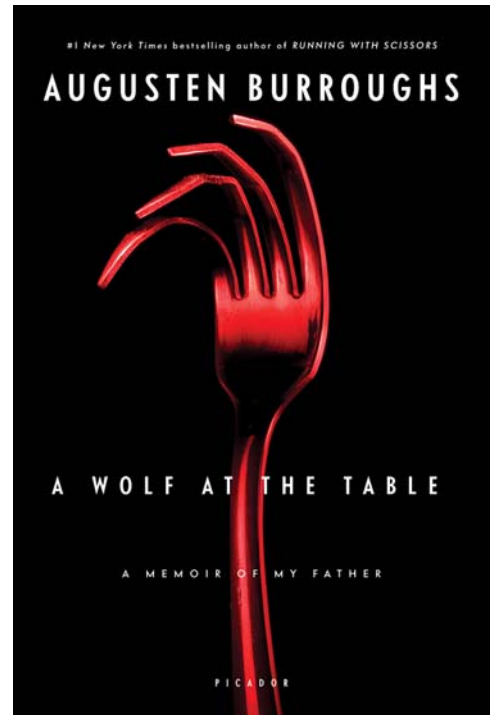
## *A Wolf at the Table*

*A Novel*

*by Augusten Burroughs*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *A Wolf at the Table* 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 *A Wolf at the Table*.

### About the Book

With *A Wolf at the Table*, Augusten Burroughs' sixth book and third full-length memoir, the author of *Running with Scissors* meets the challenge of writing about his abusive, alcoholic father, a man prone to potentially dangerous outbursts and unnerving spells of unreachable silence. Beginning from the uncomprehending perspective of playful but lonely boy, and closing with the self-reflective wisdom of an insightful young man, *A Wolf at the Table* is, as *The New York Times* states, a "terrifying depiction of a soulless sociopath who can barely contain a murderous rage toward his youngest son and mentally unstable wife." Yet, imbued with Burroughs' characteristic wit and skewed sensibility, it becomes an ultimately affecting tale, both heartbreaking and thoroughly entertaining.

## About the Author

**Augusten Burroughs** is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Possible Side Effects*, *Magical Thinking*, *Dry*, *Running with Scissors*, and *Sellelevision*. His work has been published in more than twenty-five countries. He lives in New York City and Amherst, Massachusetts.

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you make of the brief but chilling scene that opens *A Wolf at the Table*? How does it affect your expectations for the story that follows? If you've read Burroughs' other books, did the first pages of his new memoir shock or intrigue you? Why? How is this book a departure from his previous ones?
2. Why do you think Burroughs tells much of the memoir from the perspective of a little boy? What are the advantages and disadvantages to this approach?
3. Could the "Wolf" of the book's title be read as a metaphor that extends beyond the father? For example, can memories become more real and terrifying than the incidents or people that inspire them?
4. Compare and contrast Burroughs' portrait of his father with his portrayal of his mother in *Running with Scissors*.
5. In chapter two, how is Augusten's destruction of the violin a manifestation of his rage at his father? Where else in the book is Augusten's anger with his parents displaced onto something or someone else? Might Augusten's hypochondria (page 170) or his later problem with drinking (chapter eighteen) be examples of this? Why?
6. Consider Burroughs' website, [www.augusten.com](http://www.augusten.com), where he writes about and posts videos of his dogs Bentley and Cow. Does *A Wolf at the Table* predict or explain his intense relationships with animals?
7. On page 31, Burroughs writes that he "felt very close to his father examining his things" because "in a way, he was his things." How can people become their "things"? What objects do you associate with those who were or are important to you in your own life?
8. How do you interpret the mother's story in chapter seven about her marriage to Augusten's father? What does her story reveal about her as well as her marriage? Does her story shed any light on the father's behavior? If you've read *Running with Scissors*, does his portrayal of the mother in that book complement or conflict with your understanding of the parents' marriage and Burroughs' childhood in this book?

9. On page 107, Burroughs writes: “I realized that my father was two men – one he presented to the outside world, and one, far darker, that was always there, behind the face everybody else saw.” Do you think Augusten’s father is a sociopath? Do you think his father is capable of murder? Why?
10. Do Augusten’s feelings about his father truly evolve and change by the close of the book?

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