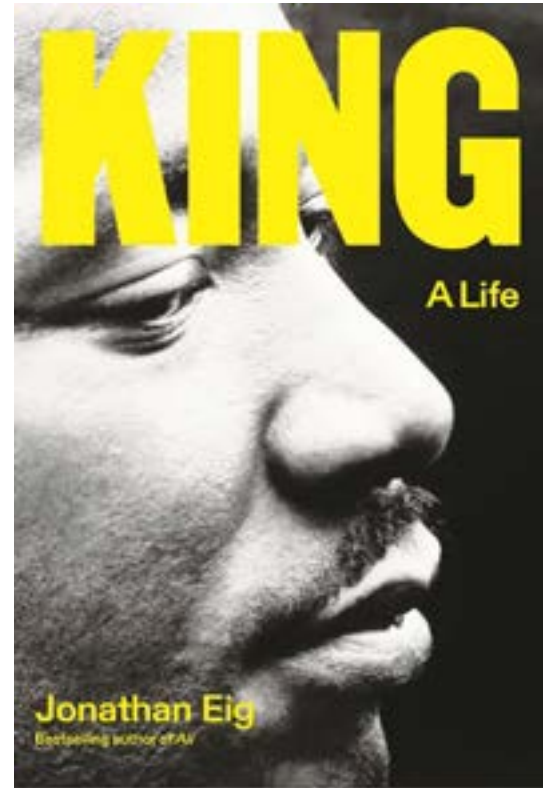


FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Reading Group Gold

King: A Life

by Jonathan Eig



ISBN: 9780374279295 / 688 pages

This reading group guide for *King: A Life* 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

Vividly written and exhaustively researched, Jonathan Eig's *King: A Life* is the first major biography of the civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. to be published in decades—and the first to draw on recently declassified FBI files. In this revelatory new portrait of the preacher and activist who shook the world, the bestselling biographer gives us an intimate view of the courageous and often emotionally troubled human being who demanded peaceful protest for his movement but was rarely at peace with himself. He casts fresh light on the King family's origins as well as Dr. King's complex relationships with his wife, father, and fellow activists.

Contact us at readinggroup@macmillanusa.com | www.readinggroupgold.com

Don't forget to check out our monthly newsletter!

Reading Group Gold

Reading Group Gold

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What inspired you to read a book about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.?
2. What did you think about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. before you began reading *King: A Life*? Did your feelings about him evolve as you read the book? If so, describe how. What changed the way you thought about Dr. King?
3. In a review for *Chicago Sun-Times*, Neil Steinberg writes that “King is such a nuanced, detailed biography, it’s like having Martin Luther King Jr. sitting in your living room.” How does Eig succeed in making Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. come alive? Were there any details of his life that you found particularly surprising? Why?
4. On the first page of *King: A Life*, Eig refers to Dr. King as “one of America’s founding fathers.” What did you think of that characterization? What do you think was Eig’s intent in describing Dr. King as such?
5. Describe Dr. King’s upbringing. How does it compare to that of other prominent leaders? Were there any aspects of Dr. King’s upbringing that surprised you? If so, what were they?
6. Eig writes that on December 5, 1955, when Dr. King made his first speech during the Montgomery bus boycott, he “found his voice, preaching a mixture of political agitation and gospel, making the radical seem reasonable, perhaps inevitable.” Explain this statement. What do you think of Dr. King’s oratory style?
7. Do you think that Dr. King grew more radical with time? Why or why not? What current events may have influenced Dr. King’s approach?
8. Eig posits that J. Edgar Hoover may have been correct to see Dr. King as a threat to the established order. Do you agree with Eig’s statement? Explain your answer. Why do you think that the FBI turned on Dr. King?

9. *The Economist* calls *King: A Life* a “magnificent new biography [that is] an overdue attempt to grapple with King in all his complexity,” stating that “it gives the reader more insight into the multifaceted man himself.” Indeed Eig does not shy away from discussing Dr. King’s flaws. What’s the effect of reading about them? Why might other biographers have shied away from the more complex parts of Dr. King’s personal life? What do you think the role of a biographer should be?
10. Mark Whitaker of *The Washington Post* writes, “Eig does a particularly nuanced job of conjuring up the mind-set of Coretta Scott King in the years before she emerged as a forceful activist in her own right.” What did you think of the way that Eig portrayed Coretta Scott King and her marriage to Dr. King? Did anything you learned about her surprise you? If so, what? What role did she play in Dr. King’s life?
11. Describe the approach that Eig takes to describing the March on Washington. Why do you think he chose to approach the event in the way that he did? What was the purpose of including Francine and Gunny?
12. What was the effect of reading about instances when Dr. King failed? What impact did failure have on him? Are there any lessons from the way that Dr. King approached failure that you found particularly helpful? What were they?
13. Dr. King described unearned suffering as redemptive. What do you think he meant? Do you agree?
14. What message do you think Eig hoped readers would take away from *King: A Life*?

Reading Group Gold

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. In a review for *The New Yorker*, Kelefa Sanneh praised Eig for capturing “King’s sense of theatre, his enormously canny ability to stage confrontations that heightened the contrast between the civil-rights movement and the people who wanted to stop it.” Watch Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech with Eig’s writing in mind. What are the tools that Dr. King employs that make the speech and his delivery of it so effective? Did watching it after reading *King: A Life* change the way you experienced it? If so, describe how.
2. In *Commonweal*, Vincent Lloyd writes, “Eig is particularly effective at gently reminding readers that there are striking parallels between the way racial justice was framed in the 1950s and ’60s and the way it is framed in the 2010s and ’20s.” Discuss this statement with your book club. Are there lessons you can learn from Dr. King with regard to activism? What are they?
3. Consider the story of Tyrone Brooks (p. 252). Why do you think that Eig chose to include it? Have you had a similar experience when meeting someone you admired? Share it with your book club.
4. To learn more about Jonathan Eig, read more about his other publications, and find out when he’ll be in a city near you, visit his official site: <https://www.jonathaneig.com/>