



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Blacktop Wasteland

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Blacktop Wasteland*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Blacktop Wasteland*, we respectfully suggest that you consider waiting before reviewing this guide.

1. “A father is a man who expects his son to be as good a man as he was meant to be.”
—Frank A. Clark.

This quote opens the novel. Do you feel this set the tone for the entire book? At the end of the novel, did you feel that Beauregard was a good father?
2. In the first chapter Beauregard is accused of cheating during a drag race. By the end of the chapter he has coerced an apology from the person that accused him. Does this indicate to you that Beauregard is a man of honor and integrity in a lawless world or that he is a character driven by rage and slights both perceived and implied?
3. Throughout the novel we are told about Beauregard’s love for his father’s ’71 Plymouth Duster. Do you feel that the Duster symbolizes Beauregard’s relationship with his father, and if so, how?
4. The novel makes several references to violence and its cyclical nature. “Money can’t fix it and love can’t tame it,” as Beauregard says. Do you feel that a propensity for violence can be inherited? If so, can that cycle be broken?
5. Beauregard makes several references to being two individuals. At times he sees himself as Beauregard, loving father and husband, and at other times he sees himself as “Bug,” outlaw getaway driver. Is this something that is universal? Do you believe we all possess this kind of duality?
6. At multiple points in the narrative Beauregard exhibits a high degree of intelligence. He is proficient in mathematics and mechanical engineering and strategy. Yet we see him seemingly drawn inexorably to illegal activities. In your life experiences, have you known someone of great intelligence who makes unfortunate decisions about their life? How much do you think Beauregard’s race and where he lives has to do with his choices or lack thereof?

7. Beaugard often thinks of his father in terms that seem both heroic and critical. At one point his mother even tells him he looks up to a ghost. Do you think by the end of the novel Beaugard's feelings for his father have solidified one way or the other? If so, how do you think he feels about him?
8. Beaugard often speaks or thinks about people underestimating him, but one of his co-conspirators, Ronnie Sessions, is able to get the better of him, if only momentarily. Do you think Beaugard underestimated Ronnie, or did he mistakenly trust him? And what do you think is the difference in respect to Beaugard's relationship with Ronnie?
9. What are some of the similarities and differences between Beaugard and Ronnie? Does it seem like they are two halves of the same coin or complete opposites?
10. Kelvin is Beaugard's cousin and his best friend. How do you feel his fate will affect Beaugard going forward after the events of *Blacktop Wasteland*?
11. By the end of the novel, Beaugard's prized Duster has been nearly demolished. Do you feel this is symbolic of a change in Beaugard as a person?
12. Despite their contentious relationship, Beaugard does his best to take care of his mother and look out for her best interests. Have you experienced a relationship with a family member that is difficult, and if so were you still able to have a positive emotional connection with that person?
13. Beaugard has a somewhat distant relationship with his daughter, Ariel, from a previous relationship. Yet her desire to go to college is one of the primary motivations for him returning to a life of crime. Did their relationship seem realistic? Did you notice any appreciable difference between his relationship with Ariel and his sons?
14. Toward the end of the book Ronnie remarks that the world is damaged. Beaugard responds that the world is fine, it's men like him and Ronnie that are damaged. Do you believe this? How much do you think their surroundings and upbringing contributed to Ronnie and Beaugard's later actions?
15. Beaugard assists a couple when their vehicle breaks down on the side of the road as he is casing the jewelry store. He takes them to a nearby hospital as the woman goes into labor. Later, Eric, the young man of the couple, is in the jewelry store when the robbery happens. He is accidentally killed by Quan. When Beaugard finds out he reacts with anger and regret. How do you feel Eric's death affected Beaugard? Do you believe his remorse was genuine?
16. At the end of the book Kia asks Beaugard if he will ever really change. Beaugard responds "I don't know if I can." Do you think men like Beaugard can ever really change?