

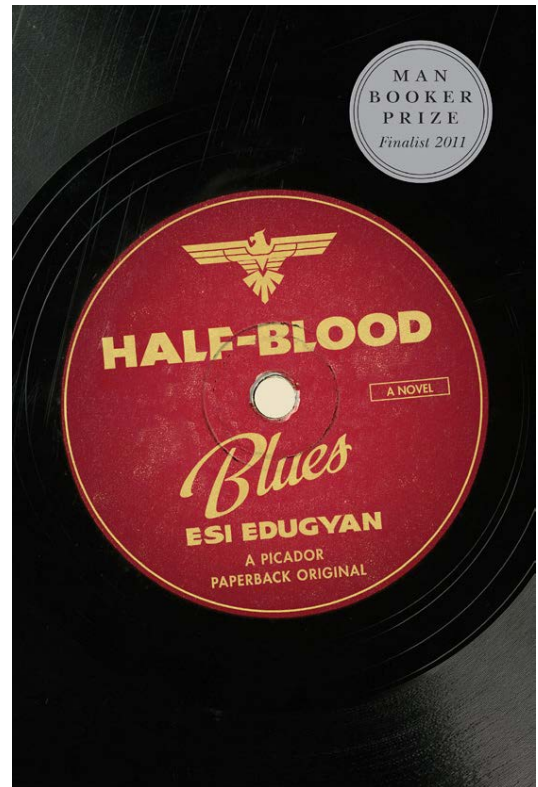
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Half-Blood Blues*

*A Novel*

by Esi Edugyan

ISBN-10: 1-250-01270-8  
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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Half-Blood Blues* 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 *Half-Blood Blues*.

Guide courtesy of The Man Booker Prize

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## About the Book

A FINALIST FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE 2011

**Berlin, 1939.** The Hot-Time Swingers, a popular German American jazz band, have been forbidden to play live because the Nazis have banned their “degenerate” music. After escaping to Paris, where they meet Louis Armstrong, the band’s brilliant young trumpet player, Hieronymus Falk, is arrested in a café by the Gestapo. It is June 1940. He is never heard from again. He is twenty years old, a German citizen. And he is black.

**Berlin, 1992.** Falk, now a jazz legend, is the subject of a celebratory documentary. Two of the original Hot-Time Swingers American band members, Sid Griffiths and Chip Jones, are invited to attend the film’s premier in Berlin. As they return to the landscape of their past friendships, rivalries, loves, and betrayals, Sid—the only witness to Falk’s disappearance who has always refused to speak about what happened—is forced to break his silence.

Sid re-creates the lost world of Berlin’s prewar smoky bars, and the salons of Paris, telling his vibrant and suspenseful story in German American slang. *Half-Blood Blues* is a novel about music and race, love and loyalty, and marks the arrival of an extraordinarily “gifted storyteller” (*Toronto Star*).

## About the Author

**ESI EDUGYAN** has a masters in writing from Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars. Her work has appeared in several anthologies, including *Best New American Voices 2003*, edited by Joyce Carol Oates, and *Revival: An Anthology of Black Canadian Writing* (2006).

Her debut novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, was published internationally. It was nominated for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, was a *More Book Lust* selection, and was chosen by the New York Public Library as one of 2004’s Books to Remember.

Edugyan has taught creative writing at both Johns Hopkins University and the University of Victoria. She lives in Victoria, British Columbia.

## Discussion Questions

1. To what end does the novel take the reader back and forth in time and place, from Berlin to Paris in the 1930s and 40s and Europe in the 1990s? How does this affect the reader?
2. Delilah is a major female character in an otherwise largely malepopulated novel. How does she push against the gender relations in the novel, and how does her romantic involvement with the other characters affect the reader’s sense of her character? Would you describe her as an early feminist?
3. Do you think that Sid, the narrator, is at the heart of Half Blood Blues? Whose novel is this?

4. *Half-Blood Blues* explores, among other things, the jazz era of the 1930s. In what ways does jazz affect the novel's structure, the voice of its characters, the tone of the book?
5. One reviewer criticized the novel on the grounds that the Afro-German experience has been sidelined. How does telling Hiero's story from the point-of-view of a different character affect it? What are the moral implications of doing so?

### Further Reading

Lawrence Hill, *Any Known Blood*

Hans Massaquoi, *Destined to Witness: Growing up black in Nazi Germany*

Mezz Mezzrow, *Really the Blues*

### Esi's recommendations from the book's back matter:

*Hitler's Black Victims: The Historical Experiences of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans, and African Americans in the Nazi Era*  
Clarence Lusane, Routledge, 2003

*Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany*  
Michael H. Kater, Oxford University Press, 1992

*Harlem in Montmartre: A Paris Jazz Story Between the Great Wars*  
William A. Shack, University of California Press, 2001



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