



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Razorblade Tears Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Razorblade Tears*. 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 *Razorblade Tears* by S. A. Cosby, we respectfully suggest that you consider waiting before reviewing this guide.

1. In chapter four, Ike retreats to his shed, ostensibly to use his heavy bag, but it's here he finally allows himself to cry. How much of Ike's intense grief do you think is based on the loss of his son and how much do you think is based on his guilt at his own intolerance in regards to Isiah's homosexuality?
2. The vandalism of their sons' gravestone provides the catalyst for Ike and Buddy Lee to begin their investigation. What do you think the destruction of the gravestone symbolizes for both Ike and Buddy Lee, and how does the way each of them sees this action determine their decisions going forward?
3. Buddy Lee and Ike are both ex-cons and are both fathers of gay sons who didn't have a positive relationship with their children. As they seek vengeance for their sons, they also encounter individuals who challenge their ideas and beliefs. Do you think either or both of them change substantially over the course of the book?
4. Buddy Lee often uses humor in his conversations. Do you think this is a defense or coping mechanism, and if so, is it healthy?

5. Ike and Buddy Lee don't get along at the beginning of the book, but over time their relationship grows and becomes a friendship. One of the things they disagree on is race and how it affects both of their lives. In those conversations who learned the most? Ike or Buddy Lee—or did they both educate each other equally?
6. Love is a major theme of the book: platonic, fraternal, and intimate. The book highlights the love between Isiah and Derek, Ike's love for his son and his wife, Buddy Lee's love for his own son and his ex-wife, and ultimately the fraternal love between Ike and Buddy Lee. Do these various forms of love elevate the narrative and the characters? Did it make you care more about their fates?
7. Violence is a major component of the narrative in *Razorblade Tears*. Both Ike and Buddy Lee are adept at taking and dispensing violence. Is the violence that Ike and Buddy Lee engage in a substitute for or alternative form of communication for these men who admittedly have poor coping skills?
8. Do you think that Ike and Buddy Lee did the correct thing by taking the investigation into their own hands?
9. Both fathers have been treated poorly and have treated others poorly due to ignorance and prejudice. Have you observed prejudice in your own community? If you have tried to combat it, how?
10. Ike's wife, Mya, talks about the importance of being an ally. Do you think her experiences as a mother, a Black woman, and a nurse have informed her thinking? How do you think she was able to deal with Ike when he was unaccepting of their son? Have you ever had a family member believe something that frustrated or upset you? How did you deal with it?

11. In the climactic scene, Buddy Lee and Ike note that their sons probably would have forgiven the people who killed, hurt, or betrayed them, but the fathers do not. Were you satisfied by their choices?
12. By the end of the book, a beautiful community has sprung up around Arianna. Ike has a last conversation with Isiah, where he tells him that he finally understands what his son had tried to tell him: "Love is love." What are some key moments that led him to accept this truth? How did his journey throughout the novel prepare Ike to accept it, and where do you think Ike will go from here?