

THE FIGHTER

★ MICHAEL ★
FARRIS SMITH

1. Tim O'Brien once wrote that "a true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing the things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it." Would *THE FIGHTER* fit O'Brien's definition of a "true war story?"
2. *THE FIGHTER* is a wonderfully layered novel about the possibility, at least, of redemption. What's driving Jack Boucher — indeed, what drives anyone — to make amends for a lifetime of bad choices and traitorous actions against the one you love most?
3. The literally colorful character of Annette — her body is a storybook of tattoos from head to toe — is one force pushing Jack toward that ideal of redeeming himself. She's doing it at least partly for selfish reasons, but do you believe the redemption she witnesses is the redemption she thought she craved?
4. Smith has described the relationship between Jack and his foster mother, Maryann, as possibly the "most tender" relationship he has written to date. It is the relationship of two strangers, a woman and a boy, who come to love one another. What do you see as the dynamics that make this relationship real between these two people, who move from being woman and boy to mother and child?
5. What parallels exist among Jack, Maryann, and Annette? They all, in their own ways, seem lost, and seem to have lived or be living lives they can't quite make sense of. What characteristics do you see connecting these three characters?
6. Consider Annette's lifelong devotion to her own "church of coincidence." Is so much of life really a result of chance, or is that merely what happens when we fail to direct our own actions? Is there such a thing as fate, or is it just good or bad luck?
7. The Mississippi Delta, where the blues was born, is a place unlike any other, with its rich soil and flat lands, and possessing its own complex history of race and economy. In what ways does the landscape become its own character in *THE FIGHTER*?

If you are interested in having Michael Farris Smith join your book club discussion, please contact Lauren.Velasquez@hbgusa.com

Don't forget to check out Michael Farris Smith's acclaimed *DESPERATION ROAD*, a novel set in a rough-and-tumble Mississippi town where drugs, whiskey, guns, and the desire for revenge violently intersect. AVAILABLE NOW IN PAPERBACK

