

The Book of Stone

by Jonathan Papernick

Discussion Questions for Book Groups and Clubs

- 1) The novel is set in Brooklyn, and spirit of place plays a large role in the story, informing characters' moods and actions. What does the setting contribute that wouldn't have been found in another city. In short, why Brooklyn?
- 2) The title *The Book of Stone* refers to the Stone family, but the title works on other levels as well. Why else do you think Papernick gave the novel that title?
- 3) *The Book Of Stone* is very much about fathers and sons. Matthew lives in the shadow of his father, the Judge; Walter Stone lives in the shadow of his father, the gangster Julius Stone. Is one's life inexorably informed and shaped by the lives of those who came before, or are we free to cut our own paths? Do we bear any responsibility for the actions of our predecessors?
- 4) Grief can be accompanied by vulnerability and loneliness. How might you have reacted to Seligman's "friendly" overtures if you were in Matthew's situation?
- 5) Books play a major role in Matthew's attempts to understand his father better. But Matthew's readings lead to disaster. Can we say that there is such a thing as a dangerous book?
- 6) The novel is set during the Jewish High Holidays, a time of redemption and renewal. Is redemption actually possible, or are certain actions totally unredeemable? Are any of the book's characters beyond redemption?
- 7) If the Judge had not meddled in Matthew's relationship with Fairuza, do you believe the couple would have lasted for the long haul? Explain why or why not. And why is Matthew so attracted to Dasi? What do you think their relationship is really about?
- 8) Pigeons appear again and again throughout the book. What do they represent to Matthew?
- 9) In *The Book of Stone*, the character Isaac Brilliant says that Jewish blood has been considered cheap for a long time, that Jewish blood is *permitted blood*. Given Jewish history and current events, do you agree that much of the world views Jewish blood as expendable?
- 10) The best endings to stories are both surprising *and* inevitable. Did the novel end the way you expected? What do you think happens next for Matthew Stone?