

The Sea Beach Line

by Ben Nadler

Discussion Questions for Book Groups and Clubs

- 1) A certain portrait of Israel—infused with Jewish masculinity—emerges through what we learn about the character of Alojzy. Do you see this as nostalgia for early Zionism? A feminist critique of Zionism? Something else?
- 2) Art (both written and visual) plays a significant role in this novel. For Izzy, does life imitate art or does art imitate life? Neither? Both? What about for Rayna, or for Alojzy (as far as we can tell, from his sketches and what Izzy learns)? What do you think Nadler may be suggesting about the role of art? What does *The Sea Beach Line* painting represent to Izzy?
- 3) Bits of other languages—namely Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew—appear sprinkled through the book. How does this affect your reading experience?
- 4) *The Sea Beach Line* appropriates certain religious tales and myths, at times taking artistic liberties with these narrative traditions. What do you think the writer's responsibility is in using religious narrative traditions for artistic ends?
- 5) *The Sea Beach Line* is divided into three sections, each a story or canonical trope in itself: the Yeshiva Bocher, Knickerbocker Avenue, and the Binding of Isaac. To what extent do these stories and their respective associations govern the individual book sections? As the novel progresses, does it resemble one more than the others?
- 6) The story of the Binding of Isaac is one of the most heavily debated portions of the Torah. Does *The Sea Beach Line* alter your own interpretation of this story? Why or why not?
- 7) Recently, a wave of novels and memoirs about Hasidic experience have been appearing in the literary marketplace. What do you make of Hasidic experience as portrayed in *The Sea Beach Line*?
- 8) *The Sea Beach Line* deals with the lives of street vendors in New York City. What is your personal experience with street vendors? What new information did you learn about street vending from reading *The Sea Beach Line*?
- 9) Early in the novel, Izzy says he likes to see himself as a character in a story. How does Izzy's view of himself change throughout the novel?
- 10) For much of the novel, Izzy seems to be battling between two different ways of life: the street life as represented by Alojzy and the upwardly mobile life represented by his other family members. What do you think is next for Izzy, after the final page?