

READING GROUP GUIDE



Junkyard Dogs

by Katherine Higgs-Coulthard

ABOUT THE BOOK

A suspenseful and gut-wrenching story of an unhoused teenager struggling to survive a criminal scrapping ring while unraveling a dark family history.

Josh's father has gone missing without a trace, and Gran's ready to call social services. If Josh wants to keep himself and his little brother, Twig, out of the system, he'll have to take to the streets and track down his dad. But when Josh digs too deep, his dad's old accomplices catch up to Josh and plunge him into a dangerous underground where putting his trust in the wrong person could number him in a growing pile of bodies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is revealed about Josh in the first chapter? How does this information help establish the central conflict of the novel?
- Discuss Josh's fondest memories of life in the junkyard. How did Stan fit into the family? Trace Josh's relationship with Stan throughout the novel. What does Josh learn about Stan when he finds him at the Castle?
- Discuss the relationship between Josh and Twig. Why does Josh feel responsible for Twig? Discuss why Twig keeps a folded picture of their family in his pocket.
- What does Josh mean when he says, "It just makes me so sad that he's [Twig] given up on all the magic in the world already" (p. 197). To what magic is Josh referencing? Debate whether Josh has given up on magic as well. How is there hope that the magic is being restored by the end of the novel?
- What is the difference between a house and a home? Cite evidence that Josh understands the difference. How was life in the junkyard a home? Discuss why Gran's trailer is simply a house.
- Explain the irony that Gran reserves Sunday dinner for family time. How can you tell that Gran has no regard for family?
- Describe Gran. How does she make it clear that she doesn't want Josh and Twig living with her?
- Gran says, "You're just a couple of worthless boys on your way to being worthless men" (p. 67). How does this statement reveal her view of men? In what ways is Gran a poor role model for the boys? Explain why she calls the Indiana Department of Child Services.

- Josh leaves Twig at Gran's and sets out looking for Tye Roberts, his father. Explain why Josh is so determined to find his dad. Discuss what Stan means by, "Man don't want to be found, ain't no finding him" (p. 30). Why doesn't Tye want to be found?
- Explain why Ruthie thinks Josh should respect his father's desire not to be found. Why does Josh keep searching, despite the advice from Stan and Ruthie? Discuss the risks he takes by continuing his search.
- Matt Hagle is Josh's best friend. Contrast his family with Josh's. Why does Josh say that Matt has no idea how lucky he is? How does Mrs. Hagle welcome Josh in their home? Explain how she senses that something is wrong in Josh's homelife. Why is Josh reluctant to give her too much information?
- Describe Coach. Why does he invest so much energy in Josh? What makes him suspect that Josh needs help? Discuss the scene where he takes Josh to Twig's school. Debate whether this incident confirms what he has suspected all along about Josh's family problems.
- Josh finds his dad at the junkyard. How does Tye explain his disappearance? What does Josh learn about his dad and Stan? Explain why he calls Coach when he realizes what his dad and Stan are planning.
- Discuss the difference between a father and a dad. Discuss the symbolism of Josh teaching Twig to ride a bike. How does Coach become the dad that Josh and Twig need at the end of the book?

ABOUT THE CREATOR



Katherine Higgs-Coulthard became a writer on the limb of a Sycamore tree when she was in elementary school. Since then, she's written in abandoned buildings, cemeteries, parks, and even on a tall ship, but her favorite place to write has always been the woods. Kat graduated from the University of Nebraska with a bachelor's in education and earned a master's degree from Indiana University, before completing her doctorate in education through Northeastern University. She has taught kindergarten, third, and fifth grades. Now she trains teachers at Saint Mary's College and offers writing camps and classes for children and teens through Michiana Writers' Center. *Junkyard Dogs* is Katherine's first book with Peachtree Teen. She lives in Michigan and loves spending time with her family. Follow Kat on X @michianawriter1. Learn more at WriteWithKat.com.