

BOOK CLUB KIT

"Brutal and powerful. I adored it."
— Chris Whitaker

THREE-

JOHN VERCHER

A NOVEL

FIFTHS

NOMINATED FOR THE EDGAR AWARD FOR BEST FIRST NOVEL

NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 *Three-Fifths* takes place during the O.J. Simpson trial (1995) and was originally published in 2019. Why is this story pertinent for readers today? Is there anything you think is especially relevant now that is new since the book was published?
- 2 A number of characters in *Three-Fifths* are facing difficult situations. Which character did you identify with most?
- 3 Imagine that your own best friend was released from prison and has new views that contrast sharply with your own. What would you do? Are there any choices Bobby could have made to avoid the series of events that plays out between him and Aaron?
- 4 Discuss the theme of race in the book. In particular, think about Bobby's struggles as a biracial young man raised by a white mother and lying about his father being Black. Consider how his grandfather's prejudices shaped Bobby's worldview at an impressionable age and affected his interactions with the neighbor boys. And consider Robert's romance with Isabel and the strain that race had on their relationship.
- 5 Discuss Isabel's character. In what ways was she a good influence on Bobby, and in what ways a bad influence? Did she fail him as a mother? What choices did she have, or to what extent was she trapped in her situation?
- 6 Isabel reveals a number of secrets to Bobby throughout the book, including that his father is Black and, later, that his father isn't dead. What similarities do you see in the way she made each of these secrets known? How do you think the way she revealed them affected Bobby?
- 7 What does this book say about fatherhood? Motherhood?
- 8 What are our responsibilities to our friends? Is there a point when loyalties should be abandoned, and where is that line?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 9 At one point Robert thinks, “Here he was, another brother with a white girl telling him he was a daddy. Wouldn’t his father be proud.” Discuss the use of stereotypes in the book—whether they are embraced, challenged, or avoided altogether. Do you see any correlation between society’s expectations of the characters in the book and how the O.J. Simpson trial was handled?
- 10 Think about Bobby’s revelation about passing for white: “Bobby thought the fallout only affected him. Passing for white never affected anyone else. At least, that’s what he told himself.” Do you believe that Bobby had a responsibility, beyond his own well-being, to be truthful about his race?
- 11 Toward the end of the book, Aaron makes a confession to Bobby and blames him for many of his actions. Discuss Aaron’s logic. Is there any truth behind his claims that Bobby caused Aaron to be this way?
- 12 If you’ve read other books by this author, what shared themes do you see among his novels?

If you decide to adopt *Three-Fifths* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtag #CeladonBookClub.