White Elephant

A Novel

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Reading Group Guide

1. Discuss the author's decision to tell the story from multiple points of view. How do you think the story would differ if it had been told from one point of view? Which character would you choose to tell it?

2. Which character did you identify with the most? Did that change at all during the course of the story? By the end, did you understand or even like any characters you did not like at the beginning, and vice versa? Does the novel have a hero?

3. Shame plays a big role in many of the characters' stories. Discuss feelings of shame, and whether there is ever a benefit to feeling shame, or if it is purely damaging. How did feelings of shame affect the different characters' behavior in the book?

4. Would you want to live in Willard Park? What appeals to you about it? What would you want to change?

5. Is the current development in Willard Park a departure or along the continuum of the town's growth?

6. Discuss the role that secrets play in the book. Are all secrets harmful? How did secrets affect the course of the story? Could any of the crises have been avoided if characters had revealed their secrets earlier? Did all of the secrets need to be secrets? Could they have been avoided?

7. The characters in the novel have different definitions of 'success.' Do family origins affect these definitions? What else affects these definitions? How would you define success?

8. Who changes the most during the course of the novel?

9. What will happen to these families after the story ends? Will the marriages in crisis survive?

10. Discuss the parent/child relationships in the book. Do any of them have a satisfying relationship? Do parents yearn for connection more with their children or vice versa?