

THE REMOVED

A NOVEL

BRANDON HOBSON

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. The title of this novel is *The Removed*: What do you think this might signify?
2. In the novel's prologue, Ray-Ray and Edgar are playing together as children for what will be the last time. Edgar wants to build a monster out of Legos, and Ray-Ray tells him, "There are enough monsters in this world." What do you think makes someone a monster? Do you think there are any monsters in this novel?
3. After Ray-Ray's death, Sonja begins to notice a family of deer in the backyard and becomes worried when they don't return. In the September 1 entry, Maria says, "We sat on the back deck, and I prayed for deer to return and for Sonja to heal." Many different elements of nature and the environment come up throughout the novel. Do you think each of us is connected to the natural world? What role do you think our environment plays in our ability to heal and understand grief?



4. Edgar travels by train to a place called the Darkening Land, where he meets a past acquaintance named Jackson who makes him relive old trauma. What do you think the Darkening Land represents? Is it an actual purgatory or a figment of Edgar's imagination? Something else?
5. There is speculation that Ray-Ray and Wyatt might somehow be linked. What do you think the connection between them might be? Are Ernest and Maria right to think there is something mysterious about Wyatt's similarity to Ray-Ray, or are they getting carried away?
6. Sonya's relationship with Vin is a strained and ultimately violent one. Why do you think she would be drawn to the family that killed her brother? Who do you think has more power in the relationship?

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7. Through Ernest's accelerating and then improving Alzheimer's disease, he demonstrates a tension between remembering and forgetting. How do you think his fluctuating memory affects the way he experiences grief throughout the novel? Do you think it is important to actively remember and reflect upon the painful moments of the past, the way the Echotas remember Tsala? How does the act of remembering the dead affect those still living?
8. Tsala, a departed spirit, narrates the tragedy of the Trail of Tears throughout the novel. The stories and memories that Tsala shares become a bridge between the living world and the spiritual. How would you describe Tsala's relationship to the Echota family? Did any of the folktales Tsala tells stand out to you?
9. *The Removed* takes place over the course of a week and culminates in Ray-Ray's memorial celebration. How would you describe each of the characters' transformations over the course of the week?



10. In the novel's final entry, Sonja, Ernest, and Maria attend Ray-Ray's memorial. As they are looking into the distance Maria notices and says, "Someone was walking toward us. I saw a figure, a man. Ernest noticed him too, then took my hand and squeezed it. The figure was difficult to see in only the light of the fire, but I could tell he was glowing and beautiful." Who do you think the figure represents in the novel's final moments—Wyatt, Ray-Ray, or Edgar? Could it have been all three?
11. The last word of *The Removed* is "home," and the novel questions what this concept means for those who have been forcibly separated from their homeland. Do you think the characters' senses of home change over the course of the book? How do you think they feel at the end?