



NATIONAL WRITERS SERIES Writers Series of Traverse City™

presents

“FIND YOUR PARK”... in a great book

Celebrating the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service

The National Park Service (NPS) is celebrating their 100th anniversary. The National Writers Series (NWS) is joining in the celebration by suggesting books and providing discussion guides that encourage book groups to read stories that are connected to the

NPS. We hope that by reading one of these books, your book group members might rediscover a favorite park or discover a new place. In celebration of their 100th anniversary, the NPS hopes to connect people to parks and help communities protect what is special to them, highlight their history, and retain or rebuild their economic and environmental sustainability. Join in the celebration and encourage your book group to read one (or more) of these great books.

Monthly
Book Discussion Group

APRIL 2015 SELECTION

A Sudden Light by Garth Stein

FIND YOUR
PARK

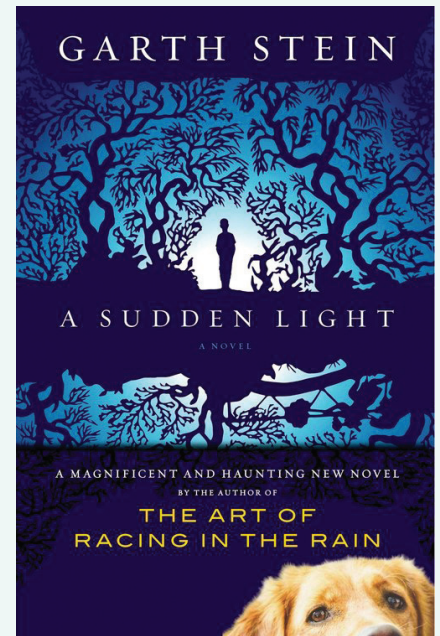
FINDYOURPARK.COM

A Sudden Light by Garth Stein

When fourteen-year-old Trevor Riddell and his bankrupt father arrive at Riddell House on Puget Sound, Trevor knows little about his father’s family or the history of the spectacular, decaying mansion. He knows only that his parents have separated and they must convince his grandfather to allow them to sell the house if there is to be any chance of reuniting his parents. But he soon learns that the Riddell family secrets are as numerous as the house’s secret rooms, and that there is something – or someone – in the house with an agenda counter to his father’s. It becomes clear to Trevor that generations of Riddells are in need of redemption before the family can be lifted from its collective guilt. Trevor may be the only one who can save them and, in turn, save himself from this oppressive cycle.



Garth Stein will make a NWS appearance on April 21.



ENHANCE YOUR BOOK GROUP & FIND YOUR PARK

The writings of John Muir, a naturalist author, and early advocate of preservation of wilderness in the United States, play a key part in *A Sudden Light*. His activism helped to preserve the Yosemite Valley, Sequoia National Park, and other wilderness areas. Research John Muir’s life and read some of his works. Discuss the influence Muir had on Benjamin and on this novel.

- Choose an outdoor setting – such as a member’s backyard, a local park, or a restaurant patio – for your book club meeting in which to discuss *A Sudden Light*.
- If there is a mansion or estate in your area that is open to the public, consider touring it with your group and learning about the history of the house and those who built it. What would the land have looked like before it was developed? What impact did the house’s owner have on your local area?

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The novel is narrated by Trevor as an adult looking back on his time at Riddell House. How does his adult point of view shape the narrative? Why do you think the author chose to frame the novel this way? How would it have been different if the story were told from Jones's perspective?
2. Jones tells Trevor that they are going to Riddell House so they can convince Samuel to sell it. What other reasons does Jones have for returning? What does he really hope will come of their visit?
3. What sort of woman is Serena? Why do you think she never left Riddell House? In what ways does she control the family narrative? What are some of her redemptive qualities?
4. Grandpa Samuel talks about what his wife, Isobel, knew: "If you feel you don't have enough, you hold on to things. But if you feel you have enough, you let go of things." Do you agree? What does each character in the novel hold on to and how does it motivate their actions? Who is most willing to let go?
5. *A Sudden Light* features generations of men. Other than Serena, the women in the story play a relatively minor role yet often have a lasting impact. How did Isobel, Rachel, and Alice influence the men in their lives?
6. Consider the theme of redemption in the novel. What drives Elijah's and Benjamin's wish to return The North Estate to its original wild forest? What do they have to atone for? Will returning the land to wilderness redeem them?
7. Why was Benjamin so conflicted during his lifetime? Is his internal conflict a result of his upbringing or education or sexuality? How much of it is a product of the place and time in which he lived?
8. The beauty and power of nature deeply move Benjamin and Trevor. What do they experience while climbing the great tree near Riddell House? How is Trevor transformed by the climb? Have you felt something similar in nature?
9. Trevor tells Dickie that he chooses truth over loyalty. Do you think seeking answers makes Trevor disloyal to his family? When Trevor reveals what he has learned to his father, what happens?
10. In what way was Jones's death an act of love? How was it a promise he had to fulfill?
11. Elijah Riddell wrote: "no man is beyond redemption as long as he acts in redeemable ways" and Ben wrote: "It is not prayer, but in deeds that we find absolution." What burdens have Elijah, Ben, Samuel, Jones, Serena, and Trevor each carried? Was each a permanent obstacle to success in life? Were the characters able to change their fates?

EXPLORE MORE:

***A Sudden Light* website:**

<http://www.asuddenlight.com/usfs-national-parks/#.VQd6uWZDGTU>

The United States Forest Service:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/>

National Parks in the Pacific Northwest:

http://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/upload/Washington_2015.pdf

http://www.nps.gov/orgs/rtca/upload/Oregon_2015.pdf