

Advent Book Study 2021: *The Boys in the Bunkhouse* by Dan Barry

Reading Schedule and Questions for Discussion

*As you read *The Boys in the Bunkhouse*, consider the following questions.*

Record any other thoughts or ideas you wish to discuss.

First Session: **Monday, November 29 at 7:00 p.m.**

Read pages 1 to 82 (Preface through Chapter 6). 82 pages, ≈12 pages a day.

1. Describe the conditions Natalie Neel-McGlaughlin finds in the old Atalissa schoolhouse.
2. What is Kenneth Henry's explanation for what happened in Atalissa?
3. How did T. H. Johnson come to employ so many adults with intellectual disabilities?
4. What was life like for the men who came from state schools to work for Johnson? How does their quality of life change after leaving the institutions?
5. Describe the background of some of the men who wound up being institutionalized. What kind of relationships did they have with their families?

6. How does Johnson's philosophy 'The magic of simplicity' relate to the treatment of his workers? What are your thoughts about the way they are treated?

7. Describe the town of Atalissa. How does the town change over time?

8. Where is God in the events described in these chapters?

Second Session: **Monday, December 6 at 7:00 p.m.**

Read pages 83 to 158 (Chapters 7 through 11). 75 pages, ≈11 pages a day.

9. How does Ed George's career intersect with the men in the Atalissa schoolhouse? Did his efforts have the intended effect?

10. How has society's perception and treatment of people with intellectual disabilities changed over the centuries?

11. Describe the relationship between the town of Atalissa and the men in the schoolhouse.

12. Who is Alford Busby? What happens to him?

13. How does what happens to Busby affect the other men? How does it affect Terry Senn?

14. How are the men from the schoolhouse involved in the life of Zion Lutheran Church?

15. Where is God in the events described in these chapters?

22. Describe the physical and emotional condition of the men as the investigation begins.
23. How do the owners of Henry's Turkey Service respond to the investigation?
24. Where is God in the events described in these chapters?

Fourth Session (**NOTE DATE CHANGE**): **MONDAY, DECEMBER 20 AT 7:00 p.m.**

Read pages 239 to 333 (Chapter 17 through *The 32 Men*). 93 pages, \approx 13 pages a day.

25. How do the men's lives change when they arrive in Waterloo?
26. What is the collective response from the people of Atalissa? What is your reaction to their response?

27. What advantages and challenges does Robert Canino bring to the men's court case against Henry's Turkey Service?

28. Describe the court proceedings. What stands out to you?

29. How does Atalissa change in the years after the men's departure?

30. Who is Leon Jones? How does his situation compare with the men from Atalissa?

31. What does Raymond Vaughn learn about his family? How does his life change as a result?

32. How have the lives of the other men changed since leaving the schoolhouse?

33. Go back and read the James Baldwin quote that opens the book. After reading *The Boys in the Bunkhouse*, consider: Is what happened in Atalissa a story that must be heard? Does the light in the narrative overcome the darkness?
34. In light of everything that has happened throughout the book, what do you think about Kenneth Henry's statement at the end of page 23 that the men living in Atalissa "conned" the lawyers, social workers, and bureaucrats? How does your answer now compare to your answer to question 4 from our first session?
35. Where is God in the events described in these chapters?