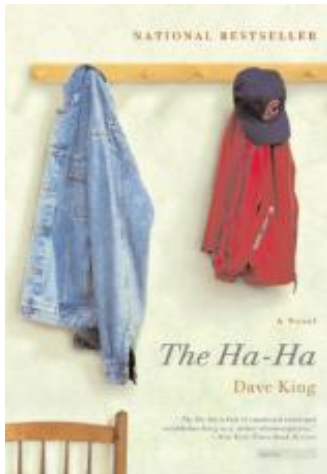


The Ha-Ha

by Dave King



About the Book

Howard Kapostash has not spoken in thirty years. The small repertoire of gestures and simple sounds that he uses to communicate lead most people to assume he is disturbed, and no one understands that Howard is still the same man he was before a wartime injury.

But when he agrees to help an old girlfriend by opening his home to her nine-year-old son, the presence of this nervous, resourceful boy in his life transforms Howard utterly. He is afforded a rare glimpse of life outside his shell—with all its exuberant joys and crushing sorrows.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the novel is called **The Ha-Ha**? Given the definition of a ha-ha --- a kind of trick of the eye that conceals a break in the landscape --- how do you think this relates to Howard's condition, or to the story as a whole?
2. How is the reader's experience of Howard Kapostash different from the way the other characters experience him? Is the first-person voice used differently in this novel from how it's used in other books?
3. Consider other novels that attempt to capture human consciousness --- for example, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. How do you think the problem is handled differently in *The Ha-Ha*?
4. What's your impression of Sylvia? If the novel has a villain, she's probably it, but how would the story be different if it were told from her perspective? Do you think Dave King has been fair in his portrayal of the female characters?
5. As readers, we learn about Howard's rehabilitation only toward the end of the book (at the beginning of Part III). How does this affect the way you understand Howard's character? Would you have liked to know his history right up

front? What is gained by the author's withholding of this information?

6. How is the idea of family important to *The Ha-Ha*? What kinds of families appear in the course of the novel? Do you think the novel gives an accurate portrayal of the state of the American family today?

7. *The Chicago Tribune* described **The Ha-Ha** as a "novel that fits the definition of a true war story," despite the brevity of the passages that actually describe war. Do you agree? What do you think is the definition of a true war story?

8. Do you see Timothy as a symbolic character or simply a plot element? If he's a symbol, what does he represent? With regard to the plot, how do you reconcile Howard's role in Timothy's fate?

9. What do you think happens after the book ends? Discuss the various characters' chances for happiness. Have they improved since the beginning of the novel?

Author Bio

Dave King holds a BFA in painting and film from Cooper Union and an MFA in writing from Columbia University. He has been published in *The Paris Review* and *Big City Lit*, and he has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He lives in New York.

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