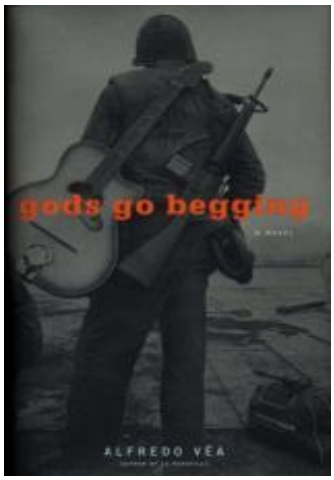
Gods Go Begging

by Jane Haddem



About the Book

Named "One of the Best Books of 1999" by the Los Angeles Times, **Gods Go Begging** tells an unforgettable story of war and peace, guilt and innocence, suffering and love, and of one man's cathartic climb toward salvation.

Discussion Guide

1. *Gods Go Begging* draws parallels between the Vietnam War and the present-day street wars raging in urban America. How do you feel the author's experiences and perspectives, both as a Vietnam veteran and a criminal attorney, shape and informthe story? Are the characters realistically depicted? Do you think Véa's background gives the text an immediacy and a narrative power it might not otherwise have?

2. Véa's novels have been described as imbued with magic realism. What, exactly, is magic realism? In what ways does Véa's unique literary style contribute to and enhance his novels?

3. Like the author, the novel's protagonist is a Vietnam vet and defense attorney living in San Francisco. Do you see Jesse Pasadoble as a stand-in for Véa? In what ways might they differ? Does Pasadoble's character-and the ways in which he grows and changes and ultimately finds redemption-offer insight into the author?

4. Véa has said that he wrote *Gods Go Begging* to "explain the Vietnam experience to myself and to others." Do you think he succeeded? He also said that "what began as a book about war slowly became a work obsessed with the idea of desire." What does he mean by this? Does Véa, like the playwright Tennessee Williams, believe that desire is the opposite of death? Does he view desire as the opposite of war, which is all about death, as opposed to life?

5. Véa,' who considers himself a Chicano and an immigrant, has stated that "America is driven by the differences of the cultures in it, not by everyone striving to be the same." Do you feel that this is also a theme of the novel? That it is as

much a book about contrasting cultures and assimilation in America as it is about war?

6. How is racism portrayed in the novel? Does Véa seem, as he has indicated, to be optimistic about a future in America without it? Does this belief-wish-hope-play out in his novel?

Author Bio

A practicing criminal defense attorney and the author of two previous novels, **La Maravilla** and **The Silver Cloud Café** (both available in Plume editions), Alfredo Véa was born in Arizona and lived the life of a migrant worker before being sent to Vietnam. After his discharge, he worked a series of jobs-from truck driver to carnival mechanic-as he put himself through law school. **Gods Go Begging** was also the winner of the 1999 Bay Area Book Reviewers' Award for Fiction. Véa lives in San Francisco.

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