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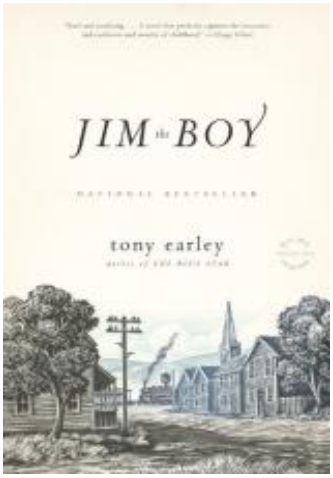
Jim the Boy : A Novel

by Tony Earley



About the Book

Selected by Granta as one of America's best young writers and featured in The New Yorker's best young fiction issue, Tony Earley now gives us a luminous portrait of a ten-year-old boy growing up in the Depression-era town of Aliceville, North Carolina:

"As the sun began to set, Jim and the uncles watched the last yellow light of the day slide up the mountain toward the bald, dragging evening behind it. When the light went out of their faces, they turned and watched it retreat up the peak, where at the summit a single tree flared defiantly before going dark. A chilly breeze whipped from nowhere across the bald and flapped the legs of Jim's overalls. He turned with the uncles for a last look at the view before heading down the mountain. All but the brightest greens had drained out of the world, leaving in their stead an array of somber blues. A low fog had begun to seep out between the trees along Painter Creek. Jim jumped down from the rock and looked again toward home."

At once delightful and wise, Jim the Boy brilliantly captures the pleasures and fears of youth at a time when America itself was young and struggling to come into its own.

Jim the Boy will appeal to the readers who loved classics like To Kill a Mockingbird, Ellen Foster, and A Member of the Wedding.

Discussion Guide

1. How do Jim's uncles each play the role of father-figure? Do they make up for his father's absence? Should Jim's mother have remarried when she had the chance in order to give Jim a "real" father?

2. Both the setting and Jim's life have a simple quality, yet through each flows a more complicated undercurrent. How do

the setting and era reflect Jim's character?

3. Why does Uncle Zeno take Jim on the trip out of town? What do the incident with the horses and his first view of the ocean teach him?

4. Jim's mother turned down the marriage proposal because she believed she had already met and married her one eternal love. Do you believe, as she does, in the idea of eternal love?

5. Why did Jim feel such a strong sense of rivalry toward Penn? What about their pasts and their families' pasts gave them a special bond?

6. Jim has moments of selfishness. How does he begin to take responsibility for his actions as he grows older?

7. In just one year, both Jim and the United States experienced tremendous change. How does Earley incorporate the evolving society into Jim's story? Think about education, the economy, electricity, transportation, race relations, and polio. What will Jim experience as society evolves that his uncles and mother never did? How will his adult world differ from theirs?

8. What role does Abraham play? What lessons does he teach Jim, both in the field and in the alley?

9. What is the significance of the final scene with Jim's grandfather and his two cousins? What realizations does Jim have during this scene?

10. Think about the stories that are told about Jim's father. What is his vision of the kind of man his father was?

Author Bio

Tony Earley was selected by Granta as one of today?s best young writers, the New Yorker featured him in its best young fiction writers issue, and the New York Times called his first novel, JIM THE BOY,"a radiant, knowing, pitch-perfect parable of childhood." He is also the author of a collection of short stories, HERE WE ARE IN PARADISE. He teaches writing at Vanderbilt University.

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