Red Weather: A Novel

by Pauls Toutonghi



About the Book

Red Weather is rich with poignant situations and hilarious scenes that are ripe for discussion, from narrator Yuri Balodis?s desperate attempts to fit in with his American peers and his constant mortification at the actions of his émigré parents (especially those of his father, Rudolfi), to his quasi-romance with the beguiling socialist Hannah Graham and his confusing attraction to his Latvian cousin, Eriks. The immigrant?s experience in America, the angst and bewilderment of adolescence, what it means to be a patriot, the power of family, the meaning of sacrifice, the relationship between fathers and sons?these are all great themes for conversation, and this guide is designed to help direct your reading group?s dialogue about Pauls Toutonghi?s wry, sweet, and unforgettable first novel.

Discussion Guide

1. What was your opinion of Yuri?s father, Rudolfi? Did your feelings about him change as you read the book?

2. Why do you think Yuri started selling the *Socialist Worker*?

3. ?I slipped in and out of a dream in which Hannah and I were at a picnic, drinking wine and eating sandwiches on delicious French bread. The bread was unbelievably fresh and the sandwiches were made from the finest-quality meats and cheeses. But the more we ate, the larger the sandwiches became. I couldn?t stop eating, I knew, because then I?d lose Hannah. So I ate and sweated and ate and sweated and ate? (page 178). What does Yuri?s dream reveal about his feelings for Hannah?

4. Of the many colorful characters in the book, which one or ones stood out for you? Why?

5. Discuss the relationship between Yuri and his father. Would you describe it as typical? If so, in what respects? If not, why?

6. The city of Milwaukee holds a special place in Rudolfi?s heart: ?He loved Milwaukee. It was his city, his adopted city, and the center of his life in his adopted country? (page 26). But in 1989, Milwaukee was in a depressed economic and social state. What are some parallels between the city and Rudolfi?s state of mind?

7. ?I was drawn to him, inexplicably drawn? (page 128). What do you think is behind Yuri?s attraction to Eriks?

8. Part 2 of the novel begins with an excerpt of a poem by Wallace Stevens, ?Disillusionment of Ten O?Clock? (page 105). What does this poem mean in terms of the events of **Red Weather**?

9. How are Eriks?s and Yuri?s fathers alike and different? How might these similarities and disparities explain why Yuri is fascinated by Eriks but rejects his own father?

10. The fall of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 is one of the story?s central backdrops. How does the author use this event metaphorically?

11. What role does alcohol?and its abuses?play in the story?

12. At several points in the novel, Yuri goes along as another person engages in reckless behavior, against his own better judgment and to disastrous results. Why is Yuri so willing to do dangerous things?

13. The balcony in the Balodis?s apartment figures prominently in the story. What does the balcony best symbolize: a precipice, a gateway, a refuge, or something else?

14. What did you think when Rudolfi?s true identity is revealed in the epilogue? Did it come as a surprise? If so, why? If not, at what other points in the novel did you find hints about Rudolfi?s former life?

15. What does the book?s title mean?

Author Bio

Pauls Toutonghi is a first-generation American. He has been awarded a Pushcart Prize, and his writing has appeared in *Sports Illustrated*, *Zoetrope*, *One Story*, and the *Boston Review*. He lives in Brooklyn.

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Publication Date: May 23, 2006
Hardcover: 256 pages
Publisher: Shaye Areheart Books
ISBN-10: 0307336751
ISBN-13: 9780307336750