Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*

We will discuss *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie* on May 10th and May 12th. There will be a twenty-question quiz on the reading.

The following study questions will help you prepare for the quiz and, more importantly, to think about the issues that MacDonald brings up in his family’s story.

**The quiz questions will be drawn directly from these study questions.**

Study Questions

1. Why were most kids in the Columbia Point projects born at home?
2. What kinds of adjectives best describe Helen? How did she exhibit her pride in herself, her family, and her people? What were her performing talents?
3. Who always had a “shitbox” and what does the term refer to?
4. What is the only thing Helen kept from her relationship with Bob King?
5. What is the problem the family faces whenever the social worker comes around?
6. What is Mass Mental? Who ended up there and why?
7. In the fears of the residents of Southie, where will bad news eventually end up?
8. How were the MacDonalds welcomed into the neighborhood of Old Colony? How do they earn everyone’s respect?
9. How did Southies distinguish themselves physically from other people?
10. What did pre-teens do for fun in Southie?
11. What was the worst thing you could be in Southie?
12. What did Michael do to get rid of cockroaches?
13. What did people boycott during National Boycott Day?
14. What was ironic about the adoption of “Fight the Power” as the song of protest for Southie?
15. How did forced busing affect many of Southie’s white teenagers?
16. How did Helen settle scores with Coley in the hospital and Chickie on the stoop?
17. How did life change for the MacDonalds after Seamus was born?
18. Who was Whitey Bulger? What did he supposedly do for Southie?
19. Why were strangers poking their heads into Kevin’s window?
20. How does Michael get involved in the drug trade?
21. How did Helen react to being shot? How did she deal with the shooter?
22. What tragic event did Davey and Kathy have in common?
23. What happened to all of Kathy’s friends who came to see her in the hospital?
24. How did Frankie get mixed up in the armed car robbery?
25. How did Kevin end up at Bridgewater State Hospital?
26. How was Whitey able to elude the police? How did he stay on good terms with people in Southie?
27. What effect did the Community Disorders Unit have on race relations in Southie? Why?
28. Why was Michael so angry that Whitey had snitched? Who else was to blame for all the problems in Southie?
29. How would you describe the case against Stevie? Why was it so hard to get justice?
30. Why was Michael so happy at Grandpa’s funeral?

Broader Issues

1. What role does silence play in the book? Is silence good or bad in the context of life in Southie?

2. The ancient Greeks defined “tragedy” as a good man brought to a bad end by the very qualities that allowed him to achieve greatness in the first place. How might one argue that this definition of “tragedy” fits the lives of several of Michael MacDonald’s siblings and the story of Southie itself?

3. Think about motherhood as it is portrayed in the book. What distinguishes “Ma” (Helen) in the story? Is she a good mother to her children? What role does she play in the Southie community?

4. Often our society conflates the issues of race and poverty: “Black and Latino people are poor; white people are middle class or wealthy.” How does All Souls complicate the issue of poverty? After reading this book, why do you think some people born into poverty remain poor while others escape poverty?

5. What were the myths the residents of Southie told themselves about their neighborhood? What were the myths that outsiders (white liberals, the media, social activists) told about the neighborhood?

6. How did Whitey Bulger exploit the residents of Southie by appealing to the very values that many residents believed made their neighborhood special?

7. MacDonald remarks that if you stand your ground, you end up going nowhere. Why is this observation especially relevant when examining the teen culture of Southie?

8. Why did the white residents of Southie hate the white liberals? Why did the liberals’ dismissal of Southie residents as “racists” (particularly during the busing crisis) tell only part of the truth?

9. How did the absence of fathers in Southie shape the culture of the neighborhood?

10. Why, after all of his harrowing experiences growing up in Old Colony, does Michael still believe Southie is “the best place in the world”?