

Hillbilly Elegy ~ J. D. Vance

Page Turners Meeting – June 12, 2018 @ 6:30

Discussion Questions:

1. J.D Vance makes it clear in the introduction that *Hillbilly Elegy* is a memoir. How do you think this affects the text? What purpose does he serve by the use of the word *elegy* in the title?
2. Vance spent time in both Middletown, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky. In what ways might these two regions of Appalachia be similar and different? Do you agree or disagree with Vance's description of these locations?
3. Vance suggests that unemployment and addiction are self-inflicted and that the Appalachian culture is one of "learned helplessness"—individuals feel they can do nothing to improve their circumstances. Do you agree with Vance's assessment? What could individuals do to improve their circumstances? Or are the problems so overwhelming they can't be surmounted?
4. What are the positive values of the culture Vance talks about in *Hillbilly Elegy*? Based upon your own knowledge or research, what elements of Appalachian culture are embellished or misleading in Vance's memoir?
5. What are some of the major themes found in Appalachian music? How might these give some insight into Appalachian history and culture?
6. The author's mother is arguably the book's most powerful figure. Describe her and her struggle with addiction. How did the violence between her own parents, Mawaw and Papaw, affect her own adulthood?
7. To What—or to whom—does Vance attribute his escape from the cycle of addiction and poverty?
8. Vance has given many interviews since the release of *Hillbilly Elegy*. What did you find most interesting about what Vance had to say?
9. Critics of *Hillbilly Elegy* accuse Vance of "blaming the victim" rather than providing a sound analysis of the structural issues left unaddressed by government. What do you think?
10. What does this book bring to the national conversation about poverty—its roots and its persistence? Does Vance raise the tone of discourse or lower it?

JOTTINGS...