

## Discussion Questions

*The Cat's Table*

by Michael Ondaatje

Book Club Meeting

Tuesday, January 8, 2013

6:30 p.m.

1. We are 133 pages into the novel before Ondaatje gives us an idea of what year it is. How does he use time—or the sense of timelessness—to propel the story?
2. How is the voyage itself a metaphor for childhood? For several characters—the three boys and Emily among them—the journey represents a loss of innocence. For whom does it have the greatest impact?
3. The anonymity of ocean travel and the sense that aboard ship we know only what others want us to know about them come into play at several points in the novel. What is Ondaatje saying about identity?
4. Discuss the importance of some of the seemingly minor characters at the table: Mr. Mazappa, Mr. Fonseka, Mr. Nevil. What do they contribute to the story?
5. "What is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power," the narrator realizes (page 75). "Nothing much of lasting value ever happens at the head table, held together by a familiar rhetoric. Those who already have power continue to glide along the familiar rut they have made for themselves." How does this prove true over the course of the novel?
6. How do the narrator's experiences breaking and entering with the Baron change his way of looking at the world?
7. Discuss the three boys' experience during the typhoon. How does it affect their friendship and their attitude toward authority figures?

8. How does the death of Sir Hector factor into the larger story?

9. What was your reaction to the revelations about Miss Lasqueti? . Miss Laqueti signs off her letter, “‘Despair young and never look back,’ an Irishman said. And this is what I did” (page 231). What does she mean?

10. How do you think her letter to Emily might have changed the events on board the Oronsay? Why didn't she send it?

11. Discuss Emily's relationship with Asuntha. Did she, as the narrator suggests on page 251, see herself in the deaf girl?

12. When Emily says to the narrator, “I don't think you can love me into safety,” (page 250), to what is she referring? What is the danger, decades after the voyage?