

# *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin: Discussion Prompts for Bi-Monthly Group

1. *Giovanni's Room* is the only one of Baldwin's novels without an African American character because he didn't want to write about race and homosexuality at the same time. Do you think this would still be an issue today?
2. What was David running from or searching for when he left his home in Brooklyn? In Chapter 1, what do we find out about his relationship with his father, aunt, and Joey?
3. What are some blatantly homophobic or transphobic passages, and how are they related to David's development in the novel? Do they serve a purpose?
4. What is the role of older gay men, especially Jacques and Guillaume, especially in relation to the young men? What gaps and hierarchies does that reveal within the gay male community, as it's being depicted here? What does all this have to do with the crime that happens later in the novel?
5. What's the role of Hella in the story? Does she stand for conventionality? Is Baldwin's depiction of her misogynistic?
6. On occasion, Baldwin describes characters as if they were animals or monsters or objects. Where do you find this in the novel? What does this convey?
7. What largely symbolic themes and images do you find in this novel, especially related to water and to stagnation/inaction/emptiness? How might these be connected to the overall themes of a search for identity, self-denial, and the notion of "home"?

8. There are some interesting passages about being an American (as opposed to being French, Italian, etc.). What relation do they have to the main themes of the novel? Is it important that this novel is set in France? How do the American characters view Europe? How do the Europeans view Americans?
9. The book opens with David watching his reflection in a window pane. The book ends (five paragraphs before the end) with David looking at his body and thinking: "It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation." Throughout the book there are many passages about being watched and being seen, such as on page 38 (Vintage International edition): "And then I watched their faces, watching him. And then I was afraid." What do you make of this?
10. What is the significance of Giovanni's room? What does it represent?
11. Were you sympathetic to Giovanni? What did you think about his history and how did that influence his current life?
12. Would a story like this be written today?
13. How did you feel about the end of the novel? What did you think the reader is supposed to take away from it?