

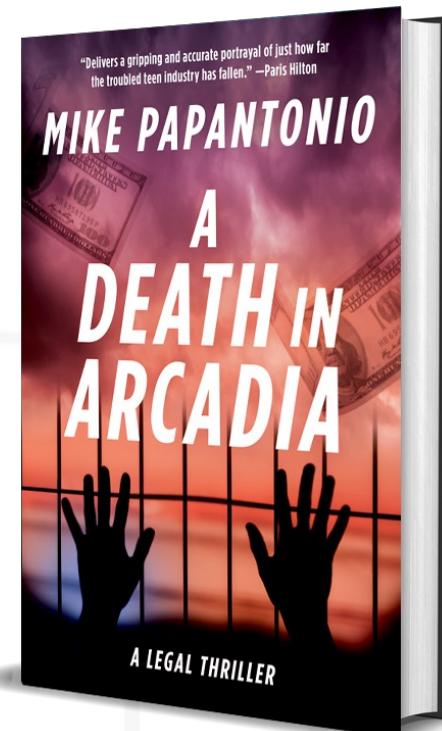
READING GROUP GUIDE

Opening and Big-Picture Questions

1. *A Death in Arcadia* opens with a kind of prologue, set in 1970. What was your immediate reaction to this first chapter? How did it shape your expectations for the story—and did those expectations change as the book unfolded?
2. The novel moves between past and present, slowly revealing how long-buried crimes still exert power decades later. How did this structure affect your reading experience?
3. Were there moments where the story felt uncomfortably close to real life? Why do you think those scenes were particularly impactful?
4. The title, *A Death in Arcadia*, alludes to the idea that even in seemingly idyllic places, darkness can exist. How does this theme play out across the novel?

Justice, Power, and Accountability

5. *A Death in Arcadia* raises difficult questions about justice delayed—and sometimes denied. Do you believe justice is ultimately achieved in the novel? Why or why not?
6. The book portrays powerful institutions that protect themselves at the expense of vulnerable people. How does Papantonio depict the mechanisms that allow abuse to continue unchecked?
7. Several characters face moral crossroads throughout the story where the “legal” choice is not necessarily the “right” one. Which of these moments stood out to you most, and how would you have responded?



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Characters and Motivation

8. The protagonist, Deke Deketomis, is driven not only by a desire for justice, but by a need for personal reckoning. How does his past shape his decisions—and his blind spots?
9. How does the novel explore the psychological cost of survival—for those who lived through abuse, and for those who later uncover the truth?

Truth, Silence, and Complicity

10. Silence plays a powerful role in the story—through institutions, communities, and individuals. Which silences felt most troubling to you, and why?
11. The book suggests that systems of abuse often rely on ordinary people looking away. Did this challenge your understanding of who is “responsible” for harm?
12. At what point does silence become complicity?

Real-World Connections and Parallels

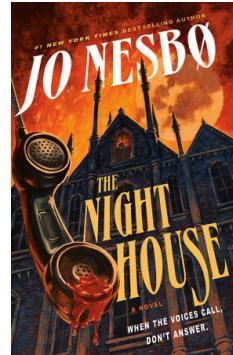
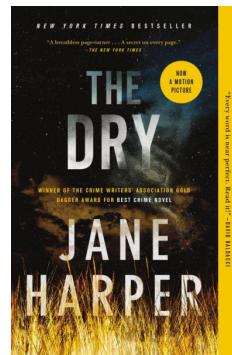
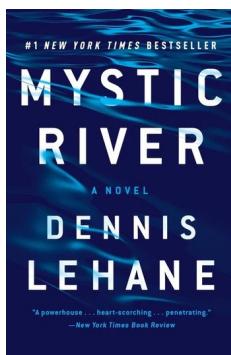
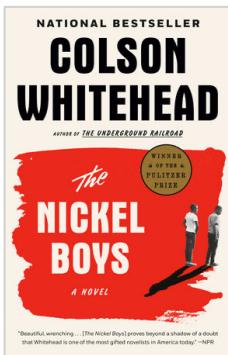
13. Papantonio draws on real historical abuses within institutional systems. Did knowing—or sensing—that this fiction reflects real events change how you read the novel?
14. Are there current events, industries, or institutions that echoed the themes of the book for you?
15. Do you think fiction like this can influence public awareness or accountability in ways journalism or nonfiction sometimes cannot?
16. Before this novel, how familiar were you with real-world cases of institutional abuse or long-buried injustices? Did the book change how you think about them?

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Closing Reflections

17. How does *A Death in Arcadia* balance its roles as a thriller and a social-justice narrative? Did one aspect ever seem to overpower the other—or did they strengthen each other?
18. What questions or images from the book lingered with you after you finished reading?
19. If you were recommending this book to a friend or another book club, what aspect would you highlight most—and why?
20. If you had to describe the emotional heart of this novel in one word, what would it be?

Further Reading and Exploration: FICTION



The Nickel Boys: A Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that examines the brutal legacy of a reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida and the lifelong consequences of institutional abuse.

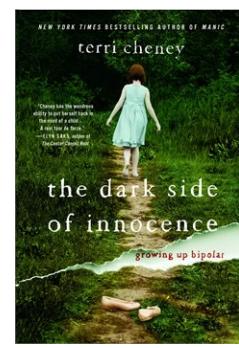
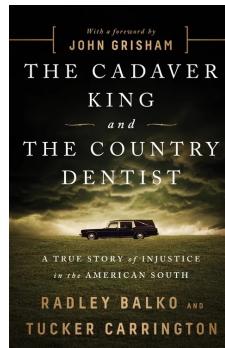
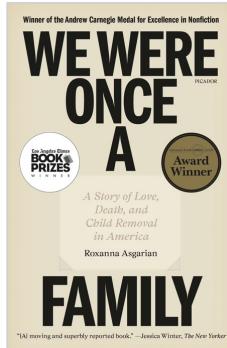
Mystic River: A haunting crime novel about childhood trauma, community silence, and how unresolved violence reverberates decades later.

The Dry: Set in a drought-stricken Australian town, this mystery reveals how long-suppressed secrets and collective guilt surface with devastating consequences.

The Night House: A psychologically charged thriller that explores memory, denial, and the unsettling aftermath of institutional failure.

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Further Reading and Exploration: NONFICTION



We Were Once A Family: A deeply reported memoir exposing systemic failures within the child welfare system and their devastating human cost.

The Cadaver King and the Country Dentist: An investigative account of wrongful convictions and the structural flaws that allow injustice to persist within the legal system.

The Dark Side of Innocence: A personal memoir examining mental illness, stigma, and the consequences of silence and misunderstanding within social institutions.

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