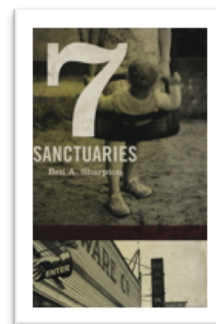


Book Club Leader's Guide

7 Sanctuaries

by Ben Sharpton



NOTE: If you would like to have your book club meeting actually led by the author contact Ben Sharpton at ben@bensharpton.com to arrange a live video conference. You will need a computer in your meeting room with Skype or Facetime (Apple) software, and high speed internet access. Sharpton welcomes opportunities to guest host book club meetings.

Introduction: *7 Sanctuaries* is a novel about life in a small Southern town during the turbulent decade of the '60s. It tells its story through seven different perspectives, or “sanctuaries” which all swirl together in the last one during a night of hope and tragedy. When facing times of tumultuous transformation, people often seek solace and comfort in safe havens or sanctuaries to protect themselves and their loved ones from the stormy world around them.

“What really stands out in this well-paced novel is the authenticity of Sharpton's voice as he meticulously draws portraits of the tumultuous world he grew up in. His characters are not wooden cartoon small-town folks without flesh and blood—they are alive and kicking reflecting an era that was undergoing vast change with profound ramifications.”
- Norm Goldman, *Bookpleasures.com*

“The stories acknowledge the dangerous power of ignorance and prejudice, but do much more to highlight human bravery, thoughtfulness, and caring. This optimism, the excellent story-telling, and the well-wrought characters all combine to make the book an interesting and inspiring read.” - C. Crenshaw, *Fearless Reviews*

“The characters are all interwoven, but not directly part of each other's lives. Sharpton ties them together very loosely, just as people in any small town are tied together without living in each other's back yards. Although this is a fiction work, it is written as if it were a true story, and is completely believable as the truth.” - Janie Sullivan, Center for Writing Excellence

How to use this leader's guide: This guide contains several learning strategies and questions designed to help your group explore the book, *7 Sanctuaries*. Use any of these strategies and questions that you feel would help facilitate the discussion. Be flexible and allow members of your book club to springboard from these activities to deeper conversations. Do not fear silence – people may just be trying to formulate their own thoughts. Have fun with this study and enjoy the company of your friends.

Questions and Learning Strategies:

1. You may want to decorate your meeting place with memorabilia from the 1960s: Drag out that old lava lamp, hang some beads, burn incense, play Rock & Roll music; wear

‘hippie glasses’, peace sign jewelry, tie-dye T-shirts, etc. You may want to offer “special brownies” (or, at least call your brownie recipe ‘special’) for a snack.

2. Open the meeting, welcome everyone, participate in introductions, if appropriate, etc.
3. Tell the group you are going to read off several different items. Ask them to raise their hands if the item applies to them.
 - I have owned an 8-track tape player
 - A friend or relative of mine served in Vietnam
 - I wore bell-bottom jeans
 - I went to Woodstock
 - I used to watch Laugh-In
 - I have been inside a fall-out shelter
 - I know who the Freedom Riders were
 - I once owned a VW (bus)
 - I once owned a VW (bus) with a peace sign painted on it
 - I have attended a tent revival
 - I have survived a hurricane
 - I remember watching Armstrong walking on the moon
 - I have hitch-hiked before
 - I know what a ‘flamin’ groovy’ is
 - I wore ‘love beads’
 - I know what a “soul handshake” is
4. Go around the circle and ask each person to briefly share one experience he/she remembers from the 1960s, OR (if your group is too young to recall actual experiences) ask each person to share something they heard about that decade.
5. *7 Sanctuaries* uses a unique vignette-based story-telling style in which events are told and retold through different perspectives (or sanctuaries). Each sanctuary is seen as a “source” one turns to for safety in times of rampant change. What did you like or dislike about this unique style?
6. The 7 sanctuaries in this novel are:
 - Family
 - Business
 - Nature
 - School
 - Church
 - Gym
 - Springlake, the world, and the rest of it

Ask volunteers to describe which sanctuary they most easily related to and why.

7. Some scenes are described more than once through different sanctuaries. Compare

Katie's experience in the tent revival (pgs. 12 – 14) with the same story as told from nature (pgs. 99 – 104). Or, compare Katie's experience in Hurricane Donna (pgs. 26 – 30) with George Robert's (pgs. 73 – 75) or Nature's (pg. 106). What do the main characters' perspectives, experiences, words and thoughts tell you about them?

8. Compare the two types of meetings held in Wagoner's Field (pgs. 99 – 104 and pgs. 110 – 114). What similarities and differences do you notice?
9. The author makes an effort to describe the book's sanctuaries in terms that might be used to describe religious sanctuaries. Compare Katie's view of the revival tent (pgs. 12 – 14) with George's view of his store (pgs. 62 – 64 and pg. 90), Stephen's view of the church (pg. 175), the Field's view of nature (pg. 114) and Coach Bridges' gym (pgs. 211 – 212)
10. On "The Night of a Thousand Crosses", members of the Ku Klux Klan erected burning crosses along highways across the south as a show of power in response to various sit-ins by black people. Note The Field's perspective of this (pgs. 104 – 105) and then read Katie's response (pg. 20).
11. Cale Kinney is a troubled young man. He plays the role of the instigator and antagonist in *7 Sanctuaries*. To better understand his motives and background, invite the readers to recall one of his scenes in the Field (pgs. 109 – 110). Give volunteers a chance to talk about Cale's character.
12. Rev. Stephen Phillips came to Springlake, Florida to make a difference. Ask volunteers to share scenes that showed him attempting to be relevant.
13. Remind the group about Dave and Missy's story (pgs. 195 – 206). What did you like and what concerned you about this vignette? What do you imagine happened to the couple? (NOTE: The author has written a short story entitled, "Something In The Air," that follows Missy a few months later. It's available as a free download from his web site: www.bensharpton.com/7-sanctuaries.html.)
14. Sanctuary 6, "The Gym", takes the novel in a new direction, appealing to sports to describe the era. What was Coach Bridges' approach to basketball? Did that approach change as a result of desegregation? What might he have done to be more successful? Are there any parallels between basketball with the real experiences going on around him?
15. Ask volunteers for reactions to the book's ending. How did the closing make them feel? Brainstorm and list words that describe those feelings. (NOTE: An Epilogue, available on the eBook version but not on the paperback version can be downloaded for free from the author's web site: www.bensharpton.com/7-sanctuaries.html.)
16. As a closing, go around the circle and allow volunteers to share significant learnings or memories they have after reading *7 Sanctuaries*.
17. Close the meeting by reminding members of upcoming events and sharing in light refreshments. (And pat yourself on the back for leading a good book club meeting).