

# UNION

A DEMOCRAT, A REPUBLICAN, AND  
A SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

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## Discussion Questions for *UNION* by Jordan Blashek and Christopher Haugh

1. During their early friendship, what were the qualities and values that drew Chris and Jordan to each other? What forces drove them apart? How does timing, context, and serendipity factor into our most important relationships?
2. What do you see as the emerging split between Jordan and Chris' worldviews? How do they articulate these differences? How does the road reveal the tensions or similarities in their perspectives? Do you feel like they are fully sharing their views? If not, why not?
3. In what way is the political rally described in *Union* a "performance"? What aspects of the rally and the protests did you find inspiring? What did you find disappointing? Do you agree with Chris and Jordan's conclusion that:

i. *“What was clear to us through the clouds of gas and smoke was how well versed Americans were in their chosen script. The rally revealed how the gathered throngs conducted themselves when the studio lights were on, the cameras were rolling, and the drama palpable. Cameras have a way of bringing out the beast in all of us.”*

4. What role does the “border wall” play in the book? What other language do Chris and Jordan use to represent the forces driving people apart? Where else do you see line-drawing taking place in public life?
5. Jordan’s military service seems to open many doors on the road. Yet, it also gives Jordan pause when faced with the possibility of introducing Chris to his fellow military veterans. What is it about service that makes it such a powerful passport around the country? What other institutions have a similar effect?
6. Chris and Jordan observe:

*“We humans will likely always separate ourselves into tribes, requiring us to give up a piece of ourselves in service to the group’s rules and mores. It’s in our nature. It’s how we stave off the dark and the brutish parts of life. When we close ranks, the rituals we share do more than give us comfort. They let us experience something greater than ourselves.”*

Do you agree with their observation? How have rituals changed in modern America? Are there rituals that we all share, or are they unique to groups?

7. Jordan and Chris’ biggest fight involves many emotional issues—illegal immigration, police shootings, and racism. What is Jordan’s primary argument in this fight? What is Chris’ primary argument? Why do you think the fight spirals out of control? Can a friendship transcend these kinds of differences?
8. Jordan and Chris come to the realization:

*“Finding common ground isn’t about being right. It’s about laying a foundation to argue passionately, while respecting the other side. It’s not about getting to agreement, but getting to the point where disagreement isn’t reason to pull away.”*

Do you agree? If so, are there areas where this does not hold? How does this understanding of “common ground” differ from the way you understand it?

9. What do you think drives Pete? At the end of the chapter, Jordan and Chris write that “Pete served the very society in which he seemed so ill at ease.” Do you agree? What other values does Pete hold? What role do family, faith, and citizenship play in his life? What role do they play in yours?
10. Jordan and Chris suggest that the American Dream is an evolving idea shaped by the people who believe—or don’t believe—in it. What does Nelson’s story teach us about it? How about Josh’s life?
11. About the American flag, Jordan writes that he “had come to terms with how it could mean what it did to him, and mean something else to Chris, and another to Zee.” What does the flag represent to each of them? What role does the Confederate flag play in this chapter? Do you think different views of the American flag can co-exist? What about the Confederate flag?
12. Jordan and Chris seem to argue that there is something important about preserving our heritage. Can preserving heritage be about the future as much as it is about the past? What does heritage do for us in the present? How do we handle the difficult, complicated, and ugly parts of what makes us who we are?
13. What role has the Boat played in the book? How has it changed Jordan and Chris?
14. Chris turns to Mimi for advice on how to bear the hard truths of Detroit. What does she counsel? What does her philosophy tell us about healing and preparing for the future? Does Jordan handle things differently than Chris?
15. What does it mean to find Deputy Clements? Why are Jordan and Chris so steadfast in searching for him? Do they accomplish their goal, and if so what does that do for them?
16. After all their searching, what do you think Chris and Jordan have learned about finding common ground, the country, and each other?