

Sea Room

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A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

Excerpted from Amazon.com "Book Description"

Set during and immediately following World War II, *Sea Room* tells the story of three generations of lobstermen and the rich lives they have built on the rugged coast of Maine. The Dupuy family, French Canadians who have made the Acadian Coast their home, live lives of quiet honor and warm simplicity until the war ravages their peaceful existence.

This is the story of how one generation reaches across to the next and offers enough love and hope to make living worthwhile again. It is about holding on to a dream—in this case building a fine sailboat—in order to hold on to love. By pursuing their dream, the Dupuys learn that those they have lost really do live on.

This is also the coming of age story of young Jordi Dupuy, who, by following the code of honor passed down by his grandfather and father, chooses to live a life of integrity—even if it means facing a charge of murder.

And, finally, this is about finding sea room—the freedom that only comes when one is pushed to the limits of adversity and chooses hope when despair seems the only option.

Reviewed in *School Library Journal* (Oct 2002, v48, i10, p196) and *Publishers Weekly* (v249, i15, p 40)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. An excerpt from the poem "Evangeline" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is provided on page 29. Pip has read this poem to Jordi on numerous occasions. What is the significance of "Evangeline" to the story? By repeating this poem, what does Pip want Jordi to understand?

2. Compare and contrast similarities and differences between Acadian or Franco-American culture and that of “mainstream” America during the time of WWII.
3. Discuss the joys and sorrows experienced by the family as Gil goes to war. How did individual characters react to Gil’s death in combat?
4. The “Book of Job” from the Bible is mentioned or quoted numerous times throughout *Sea Room*. Discuss some of the similarities and differences between the story from the Bible and the story in *Sea Room*. How does having read the chapter in the Bible add to the understanding of some of the characters in *Sea Room*?
5. How did individual family members deal with Pip’s impending death from cancer? What range of emotions were felt as he neared his death?
6. Why is it essential that Jordi finish the boat before Pip dies? Talk about how it may have been different if Pip or Gil had not died.
7. Compare and contrast the differences in spiritual belief between Pip and Nana. How are they similar or different to your own faith.
8. What does Pip mean by “sea room”? Discuss a few instances where it is mentioned by different characters and what it means for each individual. Provide an example from your own life where you could have used some “sea room”.

ACTIVITIES:

Research the following topics as you prepare to discuss Sea Room:

Acadian and Franco-American Culture

Down East Maine culture

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem, “Evangeline”

The “Book of Job” from any version of the Old Testament in the Bible

The history of boat building in Maine

The Penobscot Bay area of Maine

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Reprinted from www.nggautreau.com

Message from the Author: Have you ever asked yourself, "Now where did that thought come from?" Creative ideas are the result of a collision among two or more previously unrelated experiences, events or ideas. With fiction, I think many ingredients get thrown into the mixing bowl, some of which lurk secretly in the deepest recesses of the author's mind, and it is often difficult to trace the origin and evolution of a story.

Not so with *Sea Room*. A theme that has always intrigued me—how some people take action, even in the face of overwhelming events, while others remain passive victims—forms a basis of this book. And with that as a grounding, I can trace almost precisely the many thoughts and impressions which contributed to *Sea Room's* story line.

Thirty years ago I wrote a short story involving a grandfather, a grandson and a boat. However, I then became consumed by the corporate world and nothing ever came of it. Not a sentence of that story appears in *Sea Room*. Nevertheless the germ of the idea—grandfather, grandson, boat—simmered in my brain and every so often I said, "You know, you ought to do something with that story." Also other stories began floating around in my mind. So, eventually I walked away from a lucrative career as a management consultant, made the difficult adjustment to a much simpler life, and, quite simply, wrote,

Then one day, while in the Berkshires, I visited the Norman Rockwell museum where I saw a painting called *Outward Bound*. You may have seen it—an old man and a young boy stand gazing out at a sailing ship. The old man is bent at his waist. The boy has a wistful posture. Seagulls spiral overhead. The day is sunny but not for long; ominous clouds are massing.

The night before seeing that painting I was reading Stephen Ambrose's book about the D-Day landings. So as I stood gazing at the painting I wondered what if, out beyond the horizon in the picture, troops were landing on Omaha Beach. Questions naturally followed: who was the old man? The boy? Was someone they knew—the son of one; the father of the other—landing on the beach? And with that simple convergence of ideas, the characters of Pip, Jordi and Gil were born and a story started to take shape.

This stirred my interest in what we've come to call the "Greatest Generation." So I listened to music from WWII (music often inspires me) and the temper of the book began to emerge. For example, the character of Lydie, the young wife bravely enduring the painful absence of her husband, came almost fully rounded from Jo Stafford's song "I'll Be Seeing You". The song "Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby?" remarkably delivered up a sketch of the character Nana, the feisty and deeply religious mother who declares war on her son's enemy through Victory Gardens and scrap drives and who intercedes with God to spare the life of her only remaining child.

I immersed myself in books about the period. I read stories. I talked with my French-Canadian relatives. I listened intently to my mother-in-law who met her future husband on D-Day in a hospital in England where they worked, waiting for casualties from the beaches. My wife and I toured the coast of Maine looking for a setting and fell in love with the Blue Hill peninsula. We spent a great deal of time doing local research. I read all the essays of E.B. White who lived there. I even took a course in half-model carving and studied wooden boat building.

So I stirred all these ingredients—my love of take-charge people, my long-ago short story, the Rockwell painting, the Ambrose book, WWII music, family stories, the coast of Maine, boat building—into the pot of my writer's imagination and out came *Sea Room*.

HELPFUL LINKS:

Author's website (contains a wealth of information about *Sea Room*) www.nggautreau.com
Review of *SeaRoom* www.bookreporter.com/reviews/1931561079.asp



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