

Reading Group Guide
for
The Third Buddha
a novel by
Jameson Currier

The suggested questions are included to enhance your
group's reading of
The Third Buddha by Jameson Currier.

Questions for Discussion

The author has constructed a novel of two interwoven narratives, one told from the first person point of view—Teddy Bridges’ search for his missing brother and his struggle to “come out” as a gay man—and the other told through the third person point of view—Jim MacTiernan’s search for his missing partner, Ari Sarghello, and the couple’s struggles to remain together. Did you find the technique made one narrative more compelling than the other? What are the connections between the two narratives? Did you find the fragmenting of the chronology of the two narratives challenging?

In the narrative of Teddy and Philip Bridges, the author presents a story of two brothers, both gay. How does he differentiate each brother’s “coming out” process?

In the first sentence of the novel the author has Teddy Bridges question whether two men “can have a honest relationship.” At this point in the chronology of the events of the novel, Teddy has gone through some unfortunate affairs. How are the other relationships between gay men depicted in the novel and with what level of “honesty” between the men? Jim and Ari? Sean and Eric? Philip and Chris? Stan and Ali Hassad? How does “honesty” play into Ted’s relationships with Chris, Rico, Stan, and Allen?

In the first chapter the author includes a sex scene of a one-night stand between Teddy Bridges and Stan Chartoff. Teddy hopes that by being a good sexual partner he might also be seen as a good boyfriend or husband, a mistake he admits he has continually made with other men. How does the author handle Teddy’s sexual awakening? How does the author handle sex and relationships between gay men and gay couples in the novel? How does he heighten the romance and bonds between his characters?

Throughout the novel, the author details the history of Afghanistan and the intermingling of cultures within the Bamiyan region where the giant Buddha statues once stood. Afghanistan was once the crossroads of several ancient cultures—Greece, India, China. How is

the intermingling of modern cultures presented in the novel? And how does the author present his gay characters within them? How does he handle homophobia within the varied cultures and religions presented in the novel?

Religion and faith have been important themes in the author's work throughout his writing career. How are they handled in this novel? Is one character's faith stronger than another?

The author has mentioned that the genesis of the novel began with a desire to retell the story of the Good Samaritan during a contemporary time of war and crisis and across many cultures. In the first chapter, Stan recounts his assistance of an injured victim in Afghanistan and then comes to the aid of an injured bike messenger in Manhattan. What other "random acts of kindness" appear throughout the novel?

Several searches run throughout the novel: the search for Philip Bridges, the search for Ari Sarghello, the search for a "third Buddha" hidden within the landscape of Bamiyan. What other "searches" occur within the novel? How do these searches relate to the themes of the novel: identity, faith, homophobia, romance, and the complexity of relationships?

Several characters have nicknames: Pup, Tad, M'sheem, Barâdar. How does the author incorporate the nicknames into each character's story? How do these nicknames relate to each character's identity?

As Ari Sarghello struggles with amnesia and searches for his identity and recollections of his life, how does he handle the recognition that he is a gay man? How does he handle religion and faith?

While gay men and lesbians have made great strides in being open and recognized, there is still an uncertainty within the mainstream media on how and when to depict their personal lives within the context of newsworthy events. Does the author succeed in presenting an accurate "gay view" of significant world events?

Did you find *The Third Buddha* an appropriate title for the novel?