



Introduction

Thank you for participating in JVC Northwest's Ruined Readers Book Club. Launched as part of our 60th Anniversary celebrations in January 2016, Ruined Readers has brought together decades of former Jesuit Volunteers (FJVs), current Jesuit Volunteers (JVs), JV EnCorps members (JVEs), family, and friends around the values of Community, Simple Living, Social and Ecological Justice, and Spirituality. Using books nominated by our community, our Book Club Volunteer, staff, and Book Club participants select each book off of a compiled list. Our current JVE volunteer writes a reflection guide those engaging in our Book Club as groups or as guided self-reflections. Our hope is these conversations will bring together communities across the country and the world in a meaningful way. [Visit our Goodreads profile](#) to see all nominated books.

Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

With each year that passes, the Ruined Readers Book Club continues to evolve. In the book club's first year we selected four books, one for each of our program values. In the second year, we added a fifth book to allow for separate selections for Social Justice and Ecological Justice. In 2018-19 Book Club featured books written only by authors of color. For 2020, Ruined Readers evolved again and discerned to become recommended titles, still focusing on our core values and inclusion and equity. If you have suggestions for books to read for upcoming selections, please email bookclub@jvcnorthwest.org.

Reflection Questions

The following questions include a reading guide specific to our current selection and broader discussion questions to encourage a shared dialog around the value of social justice. This guide is meant to provide ideas and suggestions as to topics you may wish to explore individually or as a group; it is not an exhaustive list. In a group setting, please feel free to encourage book club members to ask and explore their own questions. If you are doing a self-guided reading of the book selection, we encourage you to use these questions to journal or take intentional reflective time. For example, journaling about what issues of justice are currently most present in your direct community or in your direct work and how you would like to be an agent of change to address these issues.

Reading Guide: *Ordinary Wolves* by Seth Kantner

Ordinary Wolves by Seth Kantner tackles the value of Simple Living from the point-of-view of a family who ekes out a survival life in Alaska's northwest, far from a city, and outside the closest Inupiaq village. Yet Cutuk's father, Abe, has chosen this life – and later, Cutuk chooses to return to this life.

Our changed and challenged world perhaps calls attention to survival skills.

1. Why is this book called *Ordinary Wolves*? What was the role/metaphor/insight of the interludes in the book that described wolves?
2. Cutuk is a white boy who feels like an outsider in Eskimo culture, but also feels like an outsider when he moves to Anchorage and is among white people, needing to learn the most elementary aspects of life in mainstream

culture. Where does he belong? Can you reflect upon a time when you felt between cultures? What are the advantages/disadvantages?

3. Abe does not desire money or material things. The book ends with Cutuk throwing the two gold pieces into a porcupine den. What are our current conflicts/challenges with material success, survival, independence, interdependence? Is there a conflict between simple living and survival?
4. The roles of women in this novel are challenging. Cutuk's mother is absent; his sister, Iris, is in some ways his best friend. He seems torn between Dawna and Cheryl, much as he is torn between cultures. What is your assessment of Cutuk's relationship to the women in his life?
5. Abe is an artist, of sorts. How do you understand the role of the artist in this book?
6. Takunak has many challenges as a community – teen-aged pregnancy, drinking, suicides. Perhaps this reflects some of the challenges we have witnessed in communities where we have served, lived, worked. We are all faced with the challenges that come with climate change, along with cultural change. How are we to provide witness?
7. The following quotation is from an article by Seth Kantner in the Smithsonian Magazine. "Yet our Western myth lives on: Big bears still roam this land, wolves are as common as they ever were, and caribou pass by in the thousands. Uninhabited coastlines go on forever. Millions of acres of wilderness wait, with countless ways to freeze your feet, get a billion mosquito bites, or die absolutely alone from a foolish mistake. America, if you want to glimpse your past, present, and future all at once—all mixed together—this land is your land." What about Kantner's statement, and understanding of Alaska, portends our future?

General Questions for Consideration

1. What does the value of Social Justice mean to you?
2. Did this book bring a new or different understanding of Social Justice?
3. What particular justice areas do you have the most energy around?
4. Do you have a favorite passage to share and discuss?
5. How did this book affect you? Did the reality presented seem reasonable, shocking, or somewhere in between?
6. Where can you continue to work for understanding in your direct community?
7. How will you share something you learned/some perspective you gained from this book with others?
8. What other current media (movies, books, TV, plays, etc.) are playing out similar themes? What role can these media portrayals play in the evolution of our culture?
9. Discuss how you and/or your community might be working to address inequality or issues of social justice.

Closing Notes and Moving Forward

Wrapping Up Your Group

We encourage all Book Club participants, facilitators, and hosts to reflect on the following two questions moving forward from the last Book Club meeting. We have also included several ways you can continue to explore the value of social justice moving forward.

- What is one thing you are grateful for that has come out of your experience in this Book Club?
- What is one action or intention related to social justice that you will take away from this experience?

Resources to Move the Conversation Forward

Here are some takeaways, in different mediums for continuing to live out the value of social justice. Hosts- please share these resources with your group- either at the meeting or over email before or after your meeting. Ask group members to contribute their own resources as well.

Articles and Links:

Readers will find resources at www.sethkantner.com for understanding more about the author, and the changing frontier in Alaska.



Article by Seth Kantner in The Smithsonian -- <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/alaska-meaning-myth-reality-north-to-the-future-smithsonian-journeys-travel-quarterly-180959469/>

