

***Last Bus to Freedom* Discussion Points**

1. The opening chapter of *Last Bus* begins with grown-up Donal reflecting on the cross-country adventures he had as a boy – the adventures he's about to relay to us. What role does memory play in the novel? So much of *Last Bus* is picaresque and even fantastical, from Herman's version of the wild, wild, West, to Donal's constant "storying," – is memory at all conflated with imagination? In what ways?
2. Doig was a master wordsmith known for his colorful descriptions, pitch-perfect ear for dialogue and larger-than-the-page characters. Discuss the role that language plays in the novel. How does Doig bring his cast of characters to life?
3. Doig writes, "It's funny about imagination, how it can add to your peril even while it momentarily comes to your rescue." How are Donal's "storying," and the adventures and mis-adventures he gets into throughout the novel, indicative of this?
4. Doig's fictional Two Medicine Country, based on the Montana landscape that was so formative for him in his youth, features prominently in almost all of his novels – it's as much a part of his books as any flesh-and-blood character. How does Doig evoke this hardscrabble, big-hearted, even mythic world?
5. *Last Bus to Wisdom* was inspired in part by a trip Doig made to Wisconsin via Greyhound to stay with his aunt and uncle in the summer of '51 while his father recovered from stomach surgery and his grandmother from an operation for "female troubles." Other similarities to Doig's real life abound, from Donny's bright red hair and penchant for "storying" to his being raised by a ranch-hand grandmother. Do these autobiographical elements affect your reading of *Last Bus*? How? Why do you think Doig disavowed autobiographical components to his earlier novels – why would that be important to a writer?
6. *Last Bus* is filled with non-traditional family units, from Donny being raised by his grandmother to the odd-coupling of Aunt Kate and Uncle Herman to Highpockets and the hobo crew. What do you think is Doig's take on companionship, love, and community? How is this shown in the novel?
7. Historically, the American West has been a place to start over, to hide out, to create a better life. What were the various influences that drove people to the West? Did they find community there? Why do you think movement is such a big part of *Last Bus*?
8. *Last Bus* is set in 1951, but its characters are still shadowed by the trauma of the World Wars. In what ways do we see this?

9. Donal's identification with Native Americans is integral to the novel, from his obsession with an arrowhead found on the Double W ranch, to his nickname of Red Chief, to his determination to get to Crow Fair – where he disguises himself as an Indian dancer to avoid capture by the police. Why do you think Donny so powerfully identifies with Native Americans? How are Native Americans depicted through Donny's eyes?
10. From Herman the German shielding his true identity for years, to Aunt Kate, who isn't actually the superstar singer Donny believed she was, to the Greyhound passenger who swindles Donny out of his money, the perceptions Donny has about others are frequently upended – for better and worse – throughout the novel. What do you think Doig is saying about authenticity, identity, and the gap between expectation and reality? How do we come to understand others? What's gained and what's lost when we do?