

READING GROUP GUIDE



TJ KLUNE is a Lambda Literary Award-winning author (*Into This River I Drown*) and an ex-claims examiner for an insurance company. His novels include *The House in the Cerulean Sea* and *The Extraordinaries*. Being queer himself, TJ believes it's important—now more than ever—to have accurate, positive, queer representation in stories.



1 As an employee of DICOMY, Linus Baker works under very rigid rules and regulations (and that's literally the name of the handbook he refers to quite often!). He's constantly being monitored, yet he still manages to produce quality work. Why does he push through working under such pressure? And if you were in his shoes, would you be able to work under those conditions?

2 Linus is a very lonely man and prior to investigating the Marsyas Island Orphanage, his only friend and family is his aloof cat Calliope. While building a family and a home becomes important for Linus as the story progresses, why wasn't this a priority in his past? Why is he so isolated as an adult, and do you think this can be attributed to what his home life was like growing up?

3 This book is thoroughly endearing, and part of the reason is because of the children! They each have such unique and incredible powers. Whose magical abilities appeal to you most? If you were to choose your own magical powers, what would they be and why?

4 Linus and Lucy bond over their love of music, and artists such as The Everly Brothers, Sam Cooke, Bobby Darin, The Coasters, Little Richard, The Big Bopper, and Buddy Holly are frequently mentioned. Why is music such a large part of the story? What role does it play in the characters' lives?

5 Let's talk about Chauncey! He's such a loveable and sweet character. It's clear he wants to grow up and help people. While there are many professions in which people help others (like doctors or firefighters), what about the prospect of being a bellhop specifically entices him so much?

6 Each of the characters in this book have different fears to work through and conquer. Arthur fears for the safety and wellbeing of the children. Linus fears stepping out of his comfort zone and truly being seen. The villagers fear the magical powers the children possess—and that fear manifests into hate. Do you think the characters face their fears in beneficial ways? How do you deal with your fears? Do you feel you can relate to any of the characters' ways of coping?

7 Body size is mentioned quite often throughout the book. Linus always attempts to shrink himself—both literally and figuratively. Can you explain the dichotomy between him being a larger person, yet seeming to take up little or no space? And how does size have an impact on the story overall?

8 Lucy suffers from terrible nightmares. He says that in these nightmares he has spiders on the brain. His night terrors are so bad that his bedroom is actually the closet off of Arthur's room. Do you think Lucy sleeping so close to Arthur is a good idea, or does it prevent him from being more independent like the other children? Does it show favoritism in any way? Why does he suffer from such terrible nightmares?

9 The townspeople who live near the Marsyas Island live in fear of the six children in the orphanage. Why do you think that is? Where does prejudice come from? Why do people fear the unknown?

10 At the heart of the novel is the importance of surrounding yourself with people who feel like home and finding a place where you wholeheartedly belong. How do you personally define "home?" What are the essentials?