The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein
Discussion Questions—Depending upon the size of the group, choose the questions that are most interesting to the group.

See also http://lib.colostate.edu/research/english/ReadOnFC10.html

Stein’s third novel, The Art of Racing in the Rain, was published in 2008. The narrator of the novel is Enzo—a lab-terrier mix awaiting the end of his life as a dog so he can be reincarnated as a man, an idea he got from a documentary he watched. Enzo spends his last moments alive reminiscing about his life with his master Denny Swift. The book follows these memories as he narrates the triumphs and tragedies of Denny's family during his many years with them.

Ask attendees to introduce selves briefly and answer the first question (A)

A. Who do you think is the major character in the book? Why? Is there more than one major character?
   a) Enzo (dog, narrator)
   b) Denny Swift (race car driver)
   c) Eve (wife)
   d) Zoë (daughter)
   e) Trish (grandmother)
   f) Maxwell (grandfather)
   g) someone else?

1. What role do minor characters play in the book? [Mike, Tony, Annika, Mark Fein, Mr. Lawrence]

2. “That which you manifest is before you.” Garth Stein: “We are in charge of our own lives. We create our own destiny. And we have to take responsibility—a big job. If we delegate to people around us, we get what we deserve. If we really want something, we have to set our attention on it and do everything it takes to get it. . . . The energy we put out to the world is what the world becomes for us.” Is this true for the characters in the book?

3. Would you be able to describe the scenery where the book took place? If you were to paint it, what color(s) would dominate your painting?

4. How would you describe the tone of the book?

5. Did you shed any tears while you were reading the book? When and why?

6. Describe the relationship between Enzo and Denny.

7. Describe the relationship between Enzo and Eve, Enzo and Zoe, and Enzo and Mike.
8. What role does watching television play in the book?

9. Does the timing of events impact the story? Denny being away for Zoe’s birth, Eve’s severe illness, etc.?

10. Is it true that heroes have to have flaws? Why or why not?

11. What do you think Eve’s parents’ motives were for trying to get custody of Zoe? What are your thoughts about grandparents gaining custody over a surviving parent?

12. How would a different narrator tell the events of the story? Which of the characters would be a possibility? How would that change the perception of events if it were Denny? Mike? Trish?

13. Do you believe dogs can smell cancer in humans? How does Enzo’s awareness that something is wrong with Eve influence the book?

14. How does Denny’s anger at Eve for leaving Enzo impact the arc of the book?

15. What kind of person is Annika? What does she have to gain from her accusations? Do you think she was put up to it? If she was put up to it, why does she seem to be so comfortable undressing in front of a man she just met recently?

16. How did you feel when you read the section about the test laps around the track with Enzo?

17. A good friend is a friend in need—how does Mike help make Denny’s and Enzo’s lives easier in a time of stress?

18. What role does the stuffed zebra play in the book?

19. When Enzo barks to keep Denny from signing away his rights to Zoe, what did that mean to you?

20. What role does money play in the book?

21. Does being asked to leave his own wife’s funeral give Denny extra strength to fight his in-laws?

22. How does Enzo’s approaching old age (arthritis, etc.) impact Denny’s ability to fight for custody of his daughter?

23. Enzo eats a lot of meals that he talks about quickly. Is he always very hungry at these times or is it a dog thing?

24. Do you think there will be long-term relationship difficulties between Zoe and her grandparents? Why or why not?
25. Do Maxwell and Trish feel any guilt about ruining Denny’s life? Were they instigators (setting up Annika)?

26. Is Denny a really good race-car driver? (Ferrari asks him to work for them.)

27. Does the fact that Denny was away when Eve got really sick (at least twice) impact how his in-laws feel about him?

28. Would dogs really be able to take over the world if they had opposable thumbs?

29. Do you think there were any repercussions for the girl (Annika) who accused Denny of assaulting her?

30. Do the mental aspects of race car driving that Denny tells Enzo really apply to life as a whole?

31. Does Denny become a better race driver because of the accusation against him and the consequences of the accusation? (Custody battle, financial difficulties, etc.)

32. Does Enzo interact with other dogs in the book? Does this make a difference in the way we perceive him? (He thinks he is different from other dogs.)

33. What do the people in Enzo’s life tell him that they might not tell others?

34. Why does it matter so much to Enzo that in the next life he return as a man?

35. Does Enzo really come back as a human as the epilogue suggests?