

***CEMENTVILLE* Discussion questions for book clubs**

- There is a rich body of American literature exploring war. Authors Tim O'Brien and Robert Olen Butler are among veterans whose fiction often deals with the soldier's experience of the Vietnam War. *Cementville* delves instead into that war's effects at home. How did the multiple points of view of the townspeople paint a portrait of the entire grieving community?
- What impact does class play in the way the survivors at home deal with their mourning?
- Which characters did you empathize with most? What about them made you feel that connection?
- There are several pairings in the novel: Katherine and Willis Juell, Byard Ferguson and MaLou Goins, Ginny and Levon Ferguson, Martha and Rafe Goins, to name a few. How did these couples' ability or inability to communicate paint a picture of the difficulty of dealing with social change, death, and grief?
- Maureen Juell, a curious adolescent who wants to understand the confusing world around her, fancies herself the town chronicler and historian. Did you share her frustration at the blocks put up to any real knowledge or information? How well do adults serve children by trying to shield them from grief? Would we become healthier adults with less diversion from reality, or should children be protected as much as possible from deep sadness and fear? How do Maureen's youthful impressions jibe with your own memories of dealing with difficult situations as an adolescent?
- Did the community seem to have the emotional resources to support one another in the face of tragedy? How has our society's ability and interest in supporting returned soldiers and their families changed through the years (improving or degrading)?
- Some readers have spoken of this fictional town as representing a near-forgotten way of life. Did your reading of the novel resurrect a longing for what we imagine to be old-fashioned mutual respect and fiercely protected traditions, or conversely, did you want to say so-long-and-good-riddance to old social norms? Given the passage of time, in what ways have the changes wrought on Cementville and on society as a whole in the 1960s and 1970s served us well? How have those changes hurt us?
- What sorts of stories do you envision for these characters as their lives move forward after the devastation of war?

I'd love to hear from you: PauletteLivers@gmail.com Thank you for reading!