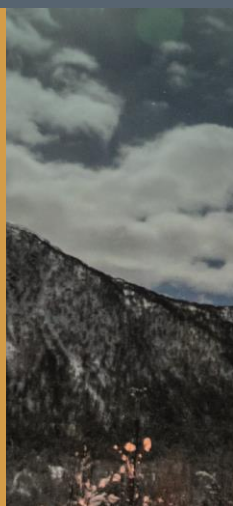




## Book club 18: Crime & guilt

*What Beauty There Is*  
by Cory Anderson



### Rules

In this book club you will discuss *What Beauty There Is* by Cory Anderson in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story. Each group member consults the group about elements of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is where you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit [www.litlab.nl](http://www.litlab.nl). A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at [www.litlab.nl/docenten](http://www.litlab.nl/docenten).



The book club is available for free under the Creative Commons licence 'NaamsvermeldingNietCommercieel-GelijkDelen 4.0 Internationaal'.

The book cover for 'What Beauty There Is' by Jack London. It features a dark, moody landscape with a person in the foreground, possibly a hunter or explorer, looking out over a vast, open area. The title 'What Beauty There Is' is written in a white, serif font at the top right.

## *What Beauty There Is*

### Introduction

*'What made you? How did you form? From where did your layers, your curves and your holes come? Your gentle and your savage places? The bright and the deep hallowed dark. The valleys and the cliffs of your soul. The loud and the silent. For what does your heart beat?'*

When Jack's mother takes her own life, Jack decides he must protect his younger brother, Matty. To do that, he wants to use the drug money that his father has hidden—the money that has destroyed their family. He just needs to find it. Ava, a girl from school, decides to help him. Her father is a killer and a thief. He was the mastermind of the crime that put Jack's father in prison. If her father finds out she is helping Jack and Matty, he will show no mercy—not to the boys, and not to her.

Their attempt to escape their desperate circumstances turns into a chilling hunt and a fight for survival. At the same time, the novel explores deeper themes: love, growing up, and the meaning of truth and justice. This book club helps you reflect on these themes and connect them to your own thoughts about the story.

### Round 1: **Understanding the plot**

Take turns turning over a card and answering the question. After the person whose turn it is has answered, the rest may add to that answer or share their own views.

### Round 2: **Initial questions**

Take turns selecting one of the excerpts (fragmenten/stukjes) from the book listed below. Think of a question you would like to ask one of the characters, and work together to find an answer to that question.

1. Jack finds the police at his house. 'Doyle watched... waiting darkness.' (p. 37–38)
2. While Jack was out job hunting, he left Matty alone. He told Matty not to open the door to anyone. 'When that... a lie.' (p. 44–45)
3. Red is pleading for Jack's life. 'Red stared... are brave.' (p. 120–122)

### Round 3: **Discussion**

Take turns turning over a card from a pile of your choice and answer the discussion question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

### Round 4: **Opinion**

Review *What Beauty There Is* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



### Question 1

What car does Jack drive?

- A. a black F-150
- B. a black Range Rover
- C. a green Ferrari
- D. a red Chevrolet Caprice

### Question 2

What does Jack find next to his mother's bed, which helps him understand her actions?

- A. a bottle of pills
- B. a foreclosure notice (telling them they have to leave the house)
- C. a letter denying his father parole
- D. a suicide note

### Question 3

What is Bardem's nickname for his daughter?

- A. my heart
- B. my bird
- C. my monkey
- D. my truth

### Question 4

How does Bardem find out his daughter has been lying to him?

- A. He asks some of the boys at school.
- B. He finds her schoolbook in Jack and Matty's hiding place.
- C. He follows her and discovers where she is going.
- D. He tracks her phone calls.

### Question 5

When Ava stabs her dad with the steak knife, in which direction does she flee?

- A. away from the cabin to lead him away from Jack and Matty
- B. back to the cabin to save Jack and Matty
- C. in the direction of the main road to find help
- D. towards to police, whose torches she can see in the distance

### Answers

- 1 D a red Chevrolet Caprice
- 2 C letter denying his father parole
- 3 B my bird
- 4 C He finds her schoolbook in Jack and Matty's hiding place.
- 5 A away from the cabin to lead him away from Jack and Matty



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



### Personal connections? 1

'Life is chaos, reader. The sooner you learn this the better' The novel contains many flashbacks. Chapter numbers go up to 33 and then count back down to 1, ending with an 'infinity-sign' chapter. Ava's chapter intros are also not in chronological order. Did this chaotic style of narration (*vertellen*) make you lose interest, or make you more interested?

### Personal connections? 2

Ava's dad warns her: 'don't put anything in your heart' - so she became 'frost-covered, black inside'. Yet, despite this she takes the risk of opening her heart to help Jack and Matty. The story does not end well for Ava. How do you feel about Ava's choices? Would you have done the same?

### Personal connections? 3

Ava asks: 'if you had one chance to save everything that mattered to you, would you grab hold of it? Or would you let it get away?' Jack has many chances to save what matters most, but instead he gets deeper into trouble each time. In your life, how do you recognise the right thing to do? Considering your answer, do you understand Jack's choices?

### Personal connections? 4

'In stories, he [Bardem] said, we learn what's really true'. Ava thinks it is '*total shit*'. How do the stories that the characters tell—both truths and lies—shape the events in the book? Were there moments when you wanted to shout at a character to either listen to or ignore these stories? Why or why not?

### Personal connections? 5

Doyle says: 'Like sometimes you realise that the thing you wanted all this time isn't what you really wanted' Midge replies, 'We all learn that. Some time or another.' In what way do the characters in the book learn this lesson? Who learns the hardest lesson? Have you ever learned a similar lesson in your life?

### Personal connections? 6

Ansel is only a side character, but his role is important in the plot. To what extent (*in welke mate*) is Ansel just a victim of the situation? Was there anything he could or should have done differently? What would you have done?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4



### Food for thought? 1

The novel is set in Idaho during winter. In what way does this setting contribute (*bijdragen aan*) to the novel's sense of suspense (*spanning*)? How does the winter setting affect the novel as a whole?

### Food for thought? 2

What do you think about a character sacrificing themselves for love? If you could change the ending to Ava's story, would you? Why or why not?

### Food for thought? 3

We experience the events in the story through the eyes of Jack, Ava, police officer Doyle, Jack's father, and even Ava's father. Do you like the way the author tells the story from different perspectives? Or would you prefer to see it through the eyes of just one or two characters? Why is that?

### Food for thought? 4

Books, poems, and songs are used as important symbols and references in the novel. Obviously, there is *Wild Fang*, but also referenced are the poems 'Invictus', 'Do Not go Gentle into that Good Night', the song 'Wonderful World'. This writing technique of using other literary texts in a story is called intertextuality. Why do you think the author uses this technique?

### Food for thought? 5

In most summaries of this novel, Ava and Jack are seen as the main characters. But what would happen if Matty wasn't in the story? Consider how his absence (*afwezigheid*) would affect the plot, suspense, and the development of Ava and Jack.

### Food for thought? 6

Both fathers in the book are (violent) criminals, but they are more than just 'the bad guys'. How does the author show that they are also complex characters? Why is this important for the story?



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4