



Snow in August

by Pete Hamill

Reading Group Guide

1. *Snow in August* starts like a modern-day fairy tale, with the phrase "Once upon a cold and luminous morning, in an urban hamlet of tenements, factories, and trolley cars on the western slopes of the borough of Brooklyn, a boy named Michael Devlin woke in the dark." In what other ways does the author use fairy tale elements, and why do you think he does so?
2. Heroes and villains, both real and imaginary, are a significant part of Michael's life. What does he learn about heroism in the course of the book? Does his hero worship help or hinder him? Do you think that heroes are necessary in our lives? Do you think children today have fewer heroes available to them than Michael does in 1946?
3. One of Michael's greatest worries in *Snow in August* is whether or not to tell the police about Frankie McCarthy beating up Mister G. Michael's mother says that informers are the "scum of God's sweet earth," but Rabbi Hirsch tells him, "You keep quiet about some crime, it's just as bad as the crime." Do you agree with Kate Devlin or Rabbi Hirsch? Whom do you think the author agrees with?
4. Over the course of *Snow in August*, Michael learns Yiddish and Rabbi Hirsch learns English. Both of them are fascinated by the power of words, and ultimately Michael draws on their power to create the Golem. What does this suggest about the power of language? Do words still have power today?
5. The shadow of World War II and the Holocaust looms over *Snow in August*. Both Kate Devlin and Rabbi Hirsch have lost a spouse to the war. Are there ways in which Kate and Leah Yaretsky are similar? What about the Rabbi and Tommy Devlin?
6. The progress of Jackie Robinson's first season with the Brooklyn Dodgers is a recurring motif in the novel. Why do Michael and the Rabbi follow his story so fervently? What do they learn from it?
7. Michael is often moved or inspired by the music of his time, from popular music to Dvorak. How do the titles of these pieces reflect the themes in *Snow in August*? Is the radio just a conduit for the music, or do you think it has a wider significance?
8. *Snow in August* is a novel full of miraculous happenings. Were you surprised that Michael was able to recreate the Golem? Why do you think the author used miracles instead of more realistic events?