

## ***Leonard and Hungry Paul* Discussion Guide**

In most novels, conflict is what provides the story with tension and suspense, and drives it forward. In *Leonard and Hungry Paul*, however, there isn't much conflict — and yet the book is difficult to put down. What drives the story forward?

The author writes in what could be called a hyper-realistic style, with extremely detailed descriptions of the ordinary elements of everyday life. How does this style contribute to the emotional impact of the narrative? Is the accumulation of detail effective? Can you imagine this narrative being written in a different voice?

The inner characters of both Leonard and Hungry Paul each grow slowly but quite a lot through the course of the book. They both seem to feel they are at an age where they need to change their thinking on some things, and be content with their understanding of other things. Discuss how they change from start to finish and what drives them.

Do you think Hungry Paul's parents sheltered him too much? Was his perception that he and his parents were happy with their living situation correct, or do you think that Grace was right in thinking her parents should get out in the world more and stop worrying about Paul?

*Leonard and Hungry Paul* feels like it could be set anywhere. Did you know that the book is actually set in Dublin? How did knowing/not knowing that affect your reading? Why do you think the author didn't make it clearer that the setting was Dublin?

Of the many relationships in the book—romantic, friendly, familial—which stood out to you as the most interesting and rewarding to read about?

From Leonard's first encounter with Shelley, to Hungry Paul's encounter with the grocery store manager, there are a number of moments that feel intensely, sometimes uncomfortably, relatable. Which moments stuck with you? What about the writing made those moments so effective?

Near the end of the book, Helen and Peter find themselves “still fitting like two jigsaw pieces after all these years.” How does the idea of fitting in, or fitting together, play out in the novel? How does it relate to the novel’s idea of society? Of friendship? Of partnership?

The author is, by day, a social worker. Does *Leonard and Hungry Paul* seem like the kind of book a social worker would write? Is there a political or sociological subtext of any kind at work in the book? Does it express a moral or ethical standpoint? Does it express a vision of what a *polis* should be?

Are there any gentle souls in your own life? Did this book make you rethink the way you see them?