

# **Young Adult Reading Group Guide**

for

## **Bob the Book**

a novel by

**David Pratt**

The suggested questions are included to enhance your group's reading of *Bob the Book* by David Pratt.

"Just what is a *gay book*?"

—"A book attracted to books  
of the same gender!"

# Bob the Book

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Meet 'Bob the Book,' a gay book for sale in a Greenwich Village bookstore, where he falls in love with another book, Moishe. But an unlikely customer separates the young lovers. As Bob wends his way through used book bins, paper bags, knapsacks, and lecture halls, hoping to be reunited with Moishe, he meets a variety of characters, both book and human, including Angela, a widowed copy of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, and two other separated lovers, Neil and Jerry, near victims of a book burning. Among their owners and readers are Alfred and Duane, whose on-again, off-again relationship unites and separates our book friends.

Will Bob find Moishe?

Will Jerry and Neil be reunited?

Will Alfred and Duane make it work?

Open

**Bob the Book**

to find all the answers...

"David Pratt takes a classic device from children's literature, the humanized object, and uses it not for a tugboat or lighthouse or velveteen rabbit but for a book on gay erotica. His voice is pitch-perfect as he follows his hero out into the world, creating a picaresque epic about books and bookstores, readers and collectors, conferences and bonfires. There's even a love story. *Bob the Book* is smart, funny, learned and, like the best bibliophiles, just a little crazy."

Christopher Bram, author of *Mapping the Territory* and *Father of Frankenstein*

"A bravura performance. David Pratt plays over the contemporary gay lit and psychology scene like Horowitz at a Steinway. His small gem of an idea goes way beyond allegory or even charm into a humorous yet serious look at what it is that men really want out of a relationship and what they are actually prepared to do to get it."

Felice Picano, author of *Art and Sex in Greenwich Village* and *Like People in History*

"You know how favorite books talk to your soul? Well *Bob the Book* is the story of what they say when you've left the room. This is a certifiable read-in-one-sitting book. And after you've talked it up, you'd rather buy another copy for that discerning friend than lend your own—parting with this book would be like turning off a necessary light."

Tom Cardamone, editor of *The Lost Library: Gay Fiction Rediscovered*

## What is a Gay Book?

When I began writing, I attended many gay literary events. Speakers would talk about the art and business of “gay books.” Someone would always say, “We have to define what we mean by a ‘gay book,’ ” and someone else would say, “It’s a book attracted to other books of the same gender!” (Knowingly or not, they were paraphrasing gay playwright Robert Patrick, when he was asked what a gay play was.)

Fast forward to 2001. I had received my MFA in Creative Writing, and some classmates and I created a project to keep ourselves writing over the summer. We had to write one self-contained piece a day and post it online for others to read. Thus, the writing was almost like a public performance. By mid-July, though, I was burned out and didn’t know what to write. One morning that old “gay book” joke came into my head. I thought, why not? If it’s terrible, I’ll just write something else tomorrow. So *Bob the Book* was born, a chapter a day (with a few days between) over six weeks. It turned out not to be terrible. My classmates loved *Bob*, so I submitted him to a gay novel contest. He did not win, but one of the judges, the author Jameson Currier, told me he loved the book. He said that, if he were a publisher, he would publish it.

Fast forward to April 2010. I had given up writing for a time-consuming day job. Then I received an e-mail from Jim Currier. He had become a publisher. And he wanted to publish *Bob*. That spur-of-the-moment idea from 2001 would become a real book in 2010. I thank you very much for reading that book. It takes a great effort to read anything for pleasure these days, so *Bob* appreciates your time and attention, and so do I! Some study questions follow. I hope you find them stimulating and fun. I am happy to entertain further questions or just feedback, at [dwp152@aol.com](mailto:dwp152@aol.com). Thank you again for reading! All the best,

David Pratt

## Questions for discussion

Bob and his friends are often bullied, and not just physically. Much of the bullying involves the way the books talk to one another. What scenes would you identify as bullying? Have you been a victim of verbal and psychological, as well as physical, bullying? How do you handle it?

In some scenes, books boast or one-up one another, trying to establish higher social rank. Does this happen in your school, or among your friends or family members? What are some ways people try to establish their superiority? How do you respond when people try to one-up you or make you feel less than?

What does the author do with books as characters that he might not be able to do with humans? What are some of the limitations of books characters?

There is a scene of gay-on-gay violence, involving Owen and man he brings home. Actually, we do not know if this man is gay. Have you been a victim of threats or violence from people you approached? Do you know about the murder of Mathew Shepard? Why might someone who was not gay allow a gay person to believe they were, then attack that person? Have you read or seen *The Laramie Project*, the play about Shepard's murder?

What do you think the character of Bob has learned by the end of the story?

The author of *Bob* wrote the novel as a school project, posting each chapter for classmates to read. Have you ever created a story, painting, etc. publicly? (A very good example would be theatrical improv.) What might the advantages and disadvantages be? Would you consider doing this with a group of your writer (or painter, composer, photographer, etc.) friends?

At the end of the novel, one plot strand is deliberately left undone. How did you respond to this? Were you disappointed?

What do you think a gay book is? The novelist Christopher Bram says it's, "A book by, for, and about gay men [and/or women]." Do you agree? Do you know books that do not fit this definition but that you consider gay? Why?

Do you think of your books as having souls and personalities? Which of your books are especially valuable to you? Do you read books electronically? Does it make to you whether a book is virtual or real? Are there other "old-fashioned" or "retro" items you like - e.g., vinyl records, vintage cars or clothing, etc.? What do you like about them?

Judaism plays an important role in *Bob*, embodied by Moishe and the woman who buys him, Dr. Manitoba. How does the inclusion of this theme affect the way in which you perceive the message of the book?

Are LGBT books or stories ever assigned in your school? Is there a course offered in LGBT literature? What are classroom discussions of LGBT works like? What issues are raised? Have you suggested LGBT books for a class or book club you were a part of? What was the response?

What personal names would you give your books and why? Do you imagine that any of them are friends or lovers—or want to be? Do you know any of the histories of your used books? How do you feel when you lend, sell, or throw out books?

It gets Better

I'm **BOB THE BOOK**. Since coming out as a gay book and having my story told\* I have heard a lot of other stories of bullying, loneliness, confusion and low self-esteem. I can identify, because a lot of that happened to me. But I promise you, based on my experience, that **YOU GET BETTER; BETTER**. It gets better because **YOU GET BETTER; BETTER** at knowing who you are; better at asking friends for support and better at supporting them; better at standing up for yourself and standing up against prejudice. It's not easy. It takes time and patience. But one day you will say to yourself: "Hey, I didn't know I could say that," or "I didn't know that person would help me," and of course, "Wow! I'm **PRETTY TERRIFIC** person (or book) after all!" Start by saying or doing something small today. And pretty soon you will see: it does get better!



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