

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.

What is a Gay Book?

When I first began writing, I attended many gay literary conferences, including the erstwhile OutWrite in Boston. Panelists would talk about the art, meaning and plight of “gay books.” Inevitably someone would say, “We have to define what we mean by a ‘gay book,’” and someone else would always say, “It’s a book that’s attracted to other books of the same gender!” (Knowingly or not, they were paraphrasing the playwright Robert Patrick, when asked what a gay play was.)

Fast forward to 2001. I had just received my MFA in Creative Writing. Our first summer, a group of us created a project called “101 Stories in 101 Days” to keep us writing during a summer break of exactly 101 days. We each had to write one self-contained piece a day and post it online for others to read. The project was thus public and performative, and such a success that we repeated it the next summer.

By the middle of that summer, I’d grown tired of being literary. I wanted to stick a thumb in the eye of “literature.” That old “gay book” quip popped into my head, and I thought, why not? So *Bob the Book* was born, a chapter a day (with three or four days between each) over six weeks. My classmates loved *Bob* (and Bob), and so I submitted him (it?) to a gay novel contest. It (he?) did not win, but one of the judges, Jameson Currier, told me he loved the book and that, if he were a publisher, he would publish it.

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

Questions for discussion

1.) How does the use of books as characters affect the narrative technique of *Bob the Book*? What can the author do with anthropomorphized books that he might not be able to do with a cast of all human characters? What are some of the limitations?

2.) *Bob* plays with the idea of books as people in many amusing ways. But there are also tragic and violent scenes side-by-side with comic ones. How do comedy and drama work together in *Bob*? How do both contribute to the message of the book?

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

4.) At the end of the novel, one plot strand is deliberately left undone. How did you respond to this? Were you disappointed? Or did it seem consistent with the rest of the book?

5.) *Bob the Book* arose from the joke about “What is a gay book?” What do you think a gay book is? The novelist Christopher Bram has offered the definition: “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 nonetheless consider gay? Why?

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

7.) Above, the author of *Bob the Book* describes the creation of the narrative as “public” and “performative,” each chapter quickly written and posted online. How do you think this technique affected the

language and narrative of *Bob*, as opposed to a text/narrative privately incubated over a longer period of time? Based on the evidence of *Bob*, might there be a particular kind of narrative suited to this practice of writing quickly and spontaneously and posting? Have you ever tried to write in this way? What was your experience?

8.) While the author and others casually refer to printed copies of the book as “Bob,” the author has revealed that copies of the novel are in fact named “Eric.” (They are simply about Bob, making confusion natural.) 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?