

Reading Group Guide for

Little Bastards in Springtime by Katja Rudolph

1. Why do you think Jevrem and his gang do b & e's? Is it only for material gain? Why do the rest of the Bastards react with such disdain to Jevrem's decision to do good by giving random people a helping hand? Is it ever right to help people without their consent?
2. Do you think the violence that Jevrem displays is part of his “true nature”? Is anyone ever “naturally” violent? Or is it a way for him to survive? Do you think we are all capable of violence given certain contexts? How do you think you would react to having lived through a civil war and siege as a child?
3. How would you describe Jevrem's relationship to Sava?
4. Why do you think that Jevrem and his surviving sister react so differently to their childhood trauma? Do you think Jevrem is living with Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome, and if so, what are the symptoms?
5. Why do you think Jevrem's mother stops playing the piano during the siege? What is the emotional breakthrough that allows her to start playing again?
6. Why is Jevrem's father so frustrated by the media coverage of Yugoslav issues as war heats up? What is he trying to accomplish through his articles?
7. Why does Jevrem feel somewhat hostile to the friends who sponsor the family's refugee claim in Canada?
8. Do you agree with the Camus quote — “A cause may be worth dying for but it's never worth killing for” — that Jevrem finds in his father's notebook?
9. Why does Jevrem lie compulsively at the beginning of the book? Why does his own lying trouble him? Do you think his account of things are always how they actually went down?
10. What do you think motivates Jevrem's urge to do good after Baka dies? Why does Jevrem feel both inspired and discouraged by youthful Baka's heroic partisan experience?
11. Why do you think Baka remained a supporter of Tito and the communists until the end of her life? What is her idea of the good?

12. What do you think of youth voluntary national service to one's country, like building railroads and bridges and factories? What do you think “we build the railroad, the railroad builds us” means?
13. How do you think the social worker in juvie could have reached Jevrem?
14. Do you think incarceration can ever offer rehabilitation and healing? Why does Jevrem feel that his only choice is to escape if he is to avoid becoming even more cruel?
15. Why is Jevrem so annoyed at the ethnically-identified gangs he meets in juvie? What does he realize about his own “diverse” gang of Yogo Bastards when he thinks about these gangs?
16. What does Jevrem learn from his experience with Wounded Belly Boy? From being on the road and meeting the truck driver, the couple on their way to eat, the teenagers playing mailbox baseball, or the student heading to write his exam? Have you ever met a stranger who has understood you and helped you get through a crisis?
17. Did you like being inside Jevrem's head?
18. Did you find the ending hopeful? What are the parallels between the beginning of the book – Baka making her way up the mountain to the partisans – and the ending of the book – Ujak Luka's farm and everything going on there?