

**Reading Group Guide for**  
***Purgatory Road***  
**by Samuel Parker**

*(Spoiler alert—these questions assume you’ve already read the book)*

1. Like Jack, have you ever felt like you wanted to be a dream version of yourself? To have a day to play life that is nothing like your normal?
2. Jack’s character struggles with what he calls “feeling immobilized by the posture of other people” (chap. 2). What do you think that means? Is that something that you struggle with?
3. Talk about your impression of Jack and Laura’s marriage. Start with the guilt and assumptions at the beginning of the novel, and discuss how you think it shifted as the couple’s circumstances changed.
4. In Molly’s internal monologue, we hear the reasons she ran away from home, including her parents. She mentions, “Their love was overbearing. Smothering goodness that she ran from. For freedom. For this.” It seems strange that she would be running from love and goodness. Why might she want freedom? Have you ever found that something that was initially overwhelming and pushing you away, was actually was you really needed all along?
5. Describe your first thoughts about Boots—as a person, as a character. Did you initially visualize him as a captor or a hero?
6. In the scene where Boots faces off against the desert storm (chap. 30), how did this leave you feeling about Boots? How did Jack and Laura’s versions sway you? Have you ever been out to the desert and seen weather like this?
7. Colton’s actions involving the man with the motorcycle were startlingly horrific. What do you think this scene added to the narrative? What did it tell us about the depravity of Colton? How does it fit with Seth’s comment to Boots (chap. 39): “Leave the world for us who know what to make of it”?
8. How did you feel about Boots after his conversation with Seth (chap. 39)? Did it seem like Boots had the power to strand Jack and Laura in the desert? What can we tell or speculate about his character from this scene?

9. During a conversation with Jack (chap. 40), Boots talks some about the “nothingness” in people’s eyes and not being “into what people are into these days.” What do you think about his bleak perspective on humanity?
10. What did you think about Jack’s plan to escape the desert on his own? Would you have done the same thing, or would you, like Laura, have waited until Boots felt you were ready? What about his choice to leave Laura behind?
11. What did you think of Boots’s discussion with Laura about Jack suffering in the desert in chapter 45? Do you think their marriage was something worth saving? Does the idea of getting back the person who someone was make sense? Can people really return to previous versions of themselves?
12. The road keeps reappearing in scenes throughout the novel. It’s also featured in the title. What meaning do you think the road has for the reader? For the characters?
13. Compare the characters of Seth and Boots. They both seem to fight for control when people are in the desert. What do they have in common? What makes them fundamentally different?
14. When Jack returns to find Laura gone (chap. 60), he’s certain that Boots has done something to her. Guilt and rage combine to twist Jack’s perception of reality: “It made sense to Jack, and that’s all that mattered.” Do you think this was all in Jack’s head or did the evidence point to his reality aligning with the truth? Have you ever created your own reality of a situation?
15. Jack realizes his need for Laura in the most desperate of situations. Do you know the people from whom you derive strength?
16. Have you ever been out to the desert? What makes it the perfect setting for a book like this?
17. Jack saved Laura and Molly despite all his shortcomings and fear. Have you ever had a situation like this, where you were stronger than you ever thought you could be?
18. How do you feel about how Red left Colten? Do you think it was justice, or do you think Red should have handled the situation differently?

19. Did you find the ending to Purgatory Road satisfactory? Were there things that you wished had been resolved but weren't? Did you like the mystery of Seth and Boots's last interaction (chap. 75)?
20. Discuss your impression of Red's memory of an old man, and then his drive into the desert where he sees the glimmer of a tin roof. Have you experienced a beacon in the wilderness that brought you hope?

