

# 2020 ONE BOOK ONE PHILADELPHIA

## Discussion Guide *There There* by Tommy Orange

1. What tone does the prologue set for the novel? How does the prologue compare to what you learned or read in school about relations between Europeans and Native Americans and the early history of the United States?
2. Discuss the use of the Indian head image in popular culture. What histories are being perpetuated by the use of a single stereotypical image, and what histories are being erased?
3. Read the “Hard, Fast” (page 8) and “Urbanity” (page 11) sections. What was the federal government’s intention behind the Indian Relocation Act (page 9), and what was the response of Native peoples who experienced the pressures of urban assimilation? What do these stories have in common with other stories of assimilation in the United States?
4. What is Tony Loneman’s relationship with what he calls “the Drome,” and why does he say that it is both his power and his curse? He claims that, unlike most people, he can see the way other people see him. How does he use the knowledge of other people’s expectations? Did you notice any other depictions in the book of looking or being looked at?
5. Consider the experiences with authenticity that different characters, such as Edwin and Orvil, describe having. What is the novel illustrating about what it means to be Native? Did anything in the book shift your ideas about Native identities?
6. *There There* is a polyphonic novel, written from the perspectives of many voices. Why do you think the author made this structural choice? How does this relate to Dene Oxendene’s storytelling project, and why is storytelling important to the survival of a community?
7. Why does Orvil decide he wants to dance in the Big Oakland Powwow? What does his grandmother say about his “Indianness”?
8. Which characters seem to be interested in connecting with their Native ancestry? What are some of the different ways they practice those connections?

9. What are the relationships that some of the characters have with money and resources? How are these relationships determined in part by history?
10. On page 77, Edwin Black asserts, “The problem with Indigenous art in general is that it’s stuck in the past.” How do Edwin and other characters seek to find a balance between honoring the past and tradition, while living in the present and looking toward the future?
11. How are girls and women depicted in *There There*? What roles do they assume in their families, and what are the dangers they face?
12. In the book, many characters are raised by someone other than their birth parents, with family separation often occurring due to violence and addiction. How does this influence what knowledge and practices are passed down?
13. What parts of Oakland are depicted in the novel? How does the city’s gentrification affect the characters and their attitudes toward home and stability?
14. What are some of the difficulties that Jacquie describes and faces in her journey of recovery (for example, on page 116)? How does the issue of sobriety affect other characters?
15. Describe the resettlement efforts at Alcatraz. What were the goals for inhabiting that land (page 48)? What vision does Opal and Jacquie’s mother have for her family in moving to Alcatraz?
16. Where does violence, both internal and external, occur in the book? Discuss this quote from page 141: “Something about it will make sense. The bullets have been coming from miles. Years. . . . The tragedy of it all will be unspeakable, the fact we’ve been fighting for decades to be recognized as a present-tense people, modern and relevant, alive, only to die in the grass wearing feathers.”
17. “People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them” (James Baldwin). How does Tommy Orange’s novel, especially at the beginning and the end, embody this idea?
18. Does the experience of reading the book change the way you see your own city, or your relationship to the past, present, and future? If so, how?