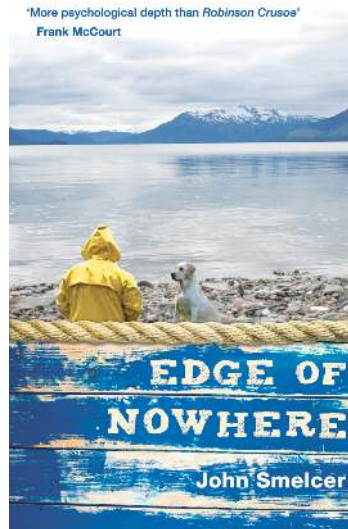




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Edge of Nowhere – a perfect book club/reading group title

READING GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE



Edge of Nowhere by John Smelcer

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This is an astonishing tale of survival; a poignant Robinson Crusoe story, based on true events. When Seth and his dog, Tucker, are washed overboard from his father's fishing boat during a torrential storm, they are assumed drowned. But by good fortune, Seth and Tucker make it safely to one of the hundreds of islands that line the Alaskan coast. Over many months, the boy and his dog make their way, island by island, towards home, while Seth's desperate father never gives up hope. Along the way, Seth learns many hard lessons about survival, and even harder lessons about himself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Smelcer won the prestigious James Jones First Novel prize for *The Trap*, which has been published in the USA by Henry Holt. He has a unique perspective on the Native American point of view, as he is himself an Ahtna Athabaskan Indian, as well as having a doctorate in contemporary literature.

SOME DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS

- At the opening of *Edge of Nowhere*, we encounter a passage about the lives of salmon and the constant struggle and danger they face. How does this create a sense of foreboding?
- Seth goes out on deck in the storm to find his dog, Tucker, and make sure he's safe. What does this say about Seth's attachment to his dog? How does Tucker play a prominent part in Seth's development and understanding of the world around him?
- There is a recurring reference to Seth's water damaged iPod and his attachment to it, even though it is broken. What does this suggest about his character?
- Does Seth and Tucker's separation from modern society and technology effect Seth's perception of life, sense of the world and his place in it?
- How does Seth's internal dialogue with his grandma, 'umma', and the ancient language she taught him, show about his connection to his heritage and how it develops throughout the story? Does the knowledge his grandma taught him help him to survive?
- Seth's father Jack was present when Seth's mother died in an unfortunate car crash. When describing her death John Smelcer adds, 'So sure-footed at sea, his father lost control on the icy land.' What does this say about Jack's attachment to his boat and the world he inhabits beyond the shore?
- Jack's shipmate and confidant, Lucky, plays a key role in guiding Jack and keeping him stable. What does the old man Lucky add to the novel? How does his relationship with Jack develop?
- Soon after Seth eats the berries the effects of poisoning take over. Why, in his fevered state, does he begin to understand all that he has lost and the pain his father has endured? Why does he reach a state of acceptance, both of the death of his mother and his father's inability to cope?
- The novel has a third-person narrative and follows the separate happenings of both Seth and Jack. Why was it written in third person? Do you think it would be improved by being written in first person instead and, if so, why?
- At the beginning of each chapter we are greeted by a short extract of a separate tale. This tale tells of a hunter who has to go through anguish in order to repent and fully understand the consequences of his actions. How does this link to Seth and his journey through the wilderness?
- As the novel begins with salmon and ends with salmon, would you count this as an allegory of the story and, if so, what would it symbolise?