



Book Club Reading Guide

About the Book

New York City, 1995: Harry Charity is a sensitive young loner haunted by a disastrous affair when he meets Jay Bishop, an outgoing poet and former Marine. Propelled by a shared fascination with the unfettered lives of Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation, the two are irresistibly drawn together, even as Jay's girlfriend, Zahra, senses something deeper developing.

Reveling in their discovery of the legendary scroll manuscript of Kerouac's *On the Road* in the vaults of the New York Public Library, Harry and Jay embark on a nicotine-and-caffeine-fueled journey into New York's thriving poetry scene of slams and open-mike nights.

An encounter with "Howl" poet Allen Ginsberg shatters their notions of what it means to be Beat but ultimately and unexpectedly leads them into their own hearts where they're forced to confront the same questions that confounded their heroes: What do you do when you fall for someone who can't fall for you? What do you do when you're the object of affection? What must you each give up to keep the other in your life?

Beatitude features two previously unpublished poems by legendary Beat Generation icon Allen Ginsberg.

Questions for Discussion

1. Which character did you relate to most: Harry, Jay or Zahra?
2. What attracted Harry and Jay to each other?
3. When did you first realize Harry was falling for Jay? Why didn't Harry realize it?
4. Is it really possible to fall in love with someone without realizing it?
5. Why did Jay stay instead of leaving when Harry's feelings for him come to light?
6. Can you be friends with someone you love who cannot love you? Can you be friends with someone who has feelings for you that you can't reciprocate?
7. When did Zahra realize what was happening between Harry and Jay? Were you surprised by her reaction? What part does she play in helping Harry and Jay remain friends?
8. How was Harry's relationship with Matteo similar to his relationship with Jay? How was it different?

9. Why did Harry stick with Matteo for so long?
10. What were Matteo's good qualities?
11. What was your favorite scene? Favorite quote?
12. How did the lives of the Beats—Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Neal Cassady—parallel the lives of Harry, Jay and Zahra?
13. Were you familiar with the Beats before you read *Beatitude*? Did *Beatitude* make you want to read any Beat books or poems?
14. Have you ever met one of your heroes and been disappointed? Has one of your heroes ever helped you through a difficult situation?
15. How did Allen Ginsberg help Harry sort out his feelings for Jay?
16. *Beatitude* is set in New York City, 1995. How did the book evoke that place and time?
17. What is the significance of the book's title? What is the significance of the cat and the New York City subway token on the book's cover?
18. Which of the secondary characters were most memorable: Deanna Kirk, the singer; Martin Tytell, the typewriter repairman; Sparrow, the poet?
19. How does *Beatitude* explore the Buddhist concept that the greatest source of suffering comes from wanting things to be other than what they are?
20. *Beatitude* emphasizes the importance of viewing the world through another's eyes and heart. Harry put himself in Jay's place, Jay put himself in Harry's place and Zahra put herself in Harry as well as Jay's place. What did they each learn by doing so?
21. What did Harry and Jay each give up to keep the other in his life at the end of the book?
22. Is beatitude possible?

