



IAM READERS GUILD

Discussion Guide

***The Violent Bear It Away* by Flannery O'Connor**

March 2010

The questions below are merely prompts to get your discussion going. Keep a brief record of the most interesting ideas that come up during your discussion, and after the meeting, send us a summary (around a paragraph long) to post to the Readers Guild blog! (Email your summary to readersguild@internationalartsmovement.org.)

1. The title of the book (as quoted in the beginning) comes from Matthew 11:12: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." What do you suppose that means?
2. Who is the "friend" who appears to Tarwater throughout the book?
3. What qualities and fantasies do the old man, Tarwater, and Rayber all share? What role does Bishop play in these?
4. What is the importance of passion in the book? How do Tarwater and Rayber deal with their passion? What is the moment of revelation in each of their lives?
5. There is a lot of symbolism throughout the book - most notably, water and fire. What role do these play in the narrative?
6. O'Connor famously wrote in a letter, "I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil." Where is the action of grace in this tale?