

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the opening pages, we discover that the boy of the title has died. And yet, he is a catalyst for everything that happens afterward. How did you perceive the boy's role in the story - as an absence? A presence? A sort of invisible stage manager? Did you sometimes forget that he was gone?

2. When did you first notice that the boy was nameless? Why do you think the author chose not to name the boy?

3. For the first time in her life, Ona gives away her secrets to a child. What is it about the boy that Ona instinctively trusts?

4. Ona observes, "People like Quinn, always running from themselves, loved the road." What does she mean by this? Is Quinn the only character "on the run" here?

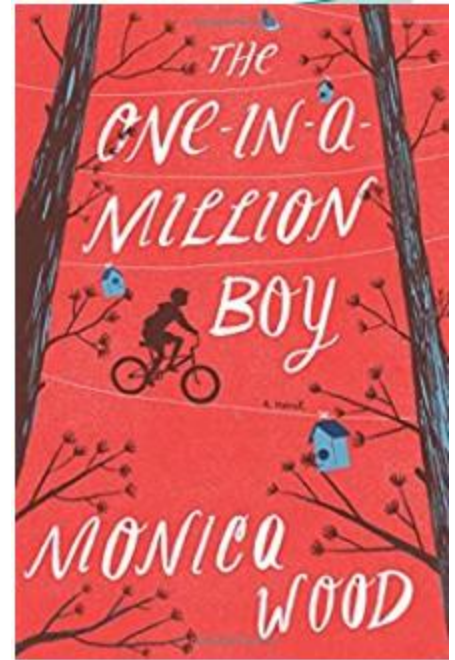
5. How does the road trip reveal the varying motivations of Ona, Quinn, and Belle? Was meeting Laurentas a surprise to you? What were you expecting to find in Granyard, Vermont?

6. When Belle says, "I figured you must have worked," Ona is thrilled to have been recognized "as the employable type." Why is her career as a "professional secretary" such a badge of honor for Ona?

7. Discuss the various friendships in the book: Ona and the boy; Ona and Quinn; Quinn and Belle; Ona and Louise. What about Quinn's friendship with his bandmates in The Benders? Or with Sylvie? To what degree are all these friendships necessary to the people involved?

8. Early on, Quinn derides Ted Ledbetter as "a middle-school teacher and single father who claimed to love woodland hikes." And yet, near the end, he thinks: "He wanted to be - God help him - Ted Ledbetter." What has changed? How is it that we so often end up admiring our rivals?

9. Whom do you believe Belle should have chosen, Quinn or Ted?



10. Quinn is “uneasy around the boy, troubled by the world in which he dwelled.” Why do you think that is the case? Why are Quinn and his son so ill-matched?

11. Near the end, Quinn confesses to Belle: “I did fall in love with him. I did. But not till after he was gone.” When and how do you think this happened?

12. The author has said, “If a writer can’t make you like a character, she must at least make you understand him.” Despite Quinn’s flaws, do you like him? If not, did you understand why he behaves the way he does?

13. “I have deficiencies,” the boy tells Ona. Does he? The author has said that she created the boy before the words “autism” or “Asperger’s” entered the American lexicon. “He’s just who he is,” Belle says, bristling against labels. Is Belle right? Does it matter?

14. Before meeting the boy, “Ona had believed herself through with friendship.” How does old age change Ona’s ideas about friendship? Did reading the novel cause you to examine your own friendships?

15. At 104, Ona is young compared to the world’s oldest citizens. This is a surprise to both her and the boy. Was it a surprise to you? Did meeting Ona change your presumptions about extreme old age?

16. The novel contains a large cast of major and minor characters. Who makes the most significant journey? Is there more than one way to identify “the main character”? To whom does this story ultimately belong?

17. Did you find the last full chapter satisfying? Was the sudden presence of the boy a surprise? Did you want to see him at this moment in his life?

18. The author has said, “In my novels I assemble families from broken parts.” Is that true in this novel? Is friendship sometimes more powerful than family ties?

19. The Guinness World Records plays a role in the book. If you were to set a record, what would it be?

20. The One-in-a-Million Boy has sold in over 20 countries, from Brazil to South Korea. What, if anything, about this American story strikes you as transcending culture?