

Discussion Questions for *Captive Audience*  
Short fiction by Dave Reidy  
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*Publisher's Description:*

Bob Newhart, R.E.M., and Abe Vigoda are just a few of the many characters—both real and imagined—who populate the world of *Captive Audience*, Dave Reidy's paean to the highs, lows, and everything in-between of being a performer. From the opening story, the award-winning "The Regular," where two music fans bond over karaoke, to the final tale, about an agoraphobic comedy fanatic whose life changes when a comedy club moves in below his apartment, this bittersweet and humorous collection gives voice to those who are driven to perform, no matter the size of the audience.

*Advance Praise for Captive Audience:*

"*Captive Audience* is wonderful. These stories—understated, honest and always touching—limn the many small perils that await a young man today on his way to settling in the world. This is an immensely rewarding book."—Scott Turow, author of *Presumed Innocent*

"Dave Reidy's stories remind us that even when we're composing our Song of Everyone Else, we're creating a distinctive Song of Ourselves, and continually gathering others into us, in a way that Walt Whitman would recognize, and celebrate."—Jim Shepard, National Book Award nominee and author of *Like You'd Understand, Anyway*

"Dave Reidy's matchless reports from the heart of twenty-first century America, a landscape of technological obsession and performance anxiety (in many forms), are elegant, precise, cool, and funny. Here is a young writer from whom we can expect much in the future."—David Leavitt, author of *The Indian Clerk*

*Discussion Questions*

1. In "The Regular," what is the nature of the relationship between Brian (the narrator) and Julian? What do they want from one another? Are they something more or something less than friends?
2. Brian and Julian can "see" musical sounds that others only hear. What does this vision suggest about how Brian and Julian see each other and the world? What blind spots—about themselves and their lives—seem to accompany this ability to see music?

3. In “Thingless,” we learn that Starlee, a skilled dancer, was denied a spot on her high-school dance team. Kyle traces every aspect of Starlee’s existence back to this rejection. How much of Starlee’s behavior is attributable to being cut from the dance team? What other factors might have an impact on the way she lives her life? Identify other characters in *Captive Audience* who cannot perform in the ways they had intended to perform. How are they affected by this reality? What positive or negative changes do they make when they learn that their dreams will not come to fruition as planned?
4. Kyle believes that, “if he showed up on the first day of high school without a thing, he’d be swept up in the swarm and lost for good.” Is he right? Can a person be noticed without “a thing?” Can having a thing—a good or a bad one—make an impact in how a person is perceived in the workplace?
5. The story concludes with two possible renditions of what happened to Kyle’s guitar. What really happened to it?
6. James, the narrator of the story “Captive Audience” is unable or unwilling to leave his home. What trauma might have contributed to his condition?
7. James has “a thing,” as Kyle from “Thingless” would define the term. How does having a thing positively impact James’s life? How might having a thing harm James’s life?
8. The only person James sees in the story is his father. Describe their relationship. How does the relationship benefit James? How might it harm him? How does the relationship benefit James’ father?
9. What about Tony makes James notice him? Why does James invest such time and energy in Tony, out of all the comedians who perform at Basement Laughs?
10. In “In Memoriam,” How does having been reported dead so long ago affect Abe Vigoda’s preparation for his actual death?
11. The Abe Vigoda and James Caan characters in “In Memoriam” would appear to have very little in common with one another. What is the basis for their friendship? What is the basis for their friendship? Why does it last?
12. Do you believe that Abe begins work on his one-man show the day after his doctor’s appointment? What might the author be trying to say in “In Memoriam” about the effect of aging on a person’s drive to perform?
13. In “Look and Feel,” the narrator attempts to live out his unrealized dream of being a musician by illustrating what music makes him feel. Does he succeed in this attempt? Why or why not? If he has succeeded, what are the costs of his success?

14. How do the narrator's insistence on cleanliness and fear of contagion manifest themselves in his art and his relationship with Nell?
15. The narrator of "Look and Feel" illustrates a newborn baby to capture the reverence he feels in the Leonids' new album. In "Postgame," newborn Matthew is at the center of watershed changes in Tim's life. How does the author use the image and symbol of the newborn in each story?
16. In "Postgame," how does Tim's retirement from basketball affect his outlook on life? How does Matthew's arrival change Tim's outlook?
17. How would you characterize the relationship between Tim and Liz? Were the bargains they made to balance career and home life struck in good faith? How might agreeing to put off motherhood have affected Liz's own hopes and dreams?
18. Describe the relationship between Tim and his son. On what level have they forged their bond? How much can the two know about one another?
19. In "Dancing Man," Dale comes to see himself as the link between the kids in the audience and the musicians on stage. What about this role satisfies him? What about it hurts him?
20. At the story's end, Dale imagines that he has managed to win over Michael Stipe, at least in part. Is Dale's redemption real, imagined or both?

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