



Hotline
Discussion

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Book Discussion Guide for *Hotline* by Dimitri Nashrallah

This book discussion guide can be used by Book Clubs both private or library-run. Or maybe you would like to use this guide to enhance your own reading experience as you follow along with Un Livrel/One eRead Canada program in April 2024.

One eRead/Un Livrel Canada is a digital book club connecting readers and libraries from across Canada.

This year's One eRead Canada pick is *Hotline* by Dimitri Nasrallah, with the French version translated by Daniel Grenier. The eBook and digital audiobook for *Hotline* will be available in April without waitlists or holds so that all Canadians can read along at the same time. Download a copy from your local library during the month and join the discussion in English or French – or both!



PAST BOOKS FEATURED

BY UN LIVREL/ONE EREAD CANADA:

Glass Beads, Dawn Dumont

Vi, Kim Thuy

The Break, Katherena Vermette

Ce qu'on respire sur Tatouine, Jean Christophe Réhel



Glass Beads
2019



Vi
2021



The Break
2022



Tatouine
2023

About the Book *Hotline*

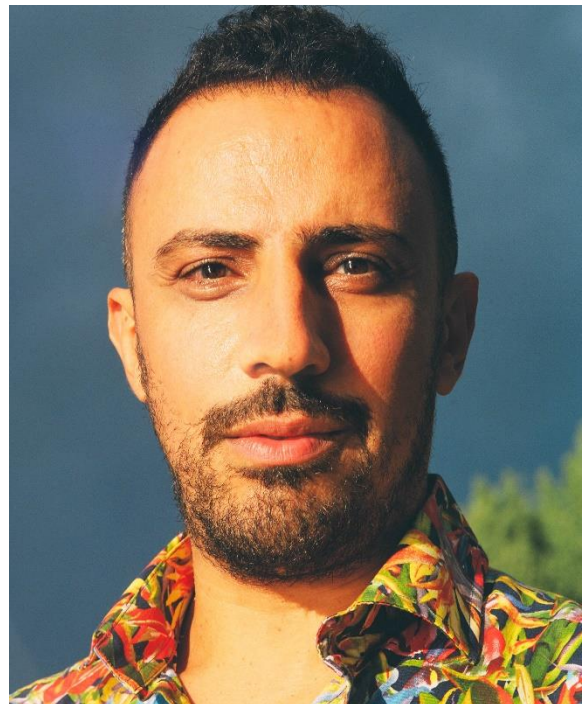
A vivid love letter to the 1980s and one woman's struggle to overcome the challenges of immigration.

It's 1986, and Muna Heddad is in a bind. She and her son have moved to Montreal, leaving behind a civil war filled with bad memories in Lebanon. She had plans to find work as a French teacher, but no one in Quebec trusts her to teach the language. She needs to start making money, and fast. The only work Muna can find is at a weight-loss center as a hotline operator. All day, she takes calls from people responding to ads seen in magazines or on TV. On the phone, she's Mona, and she's quite good at listening. These strangers all have so much to say once someone shows interest in their lives—marriages gone bad, parents dying, isolation, personal inadequacies. Even as her daily life in Canada is filled with invisible barriers at every turn, at the office Muna is privy to her clients' deepest secrets.

Following international acclaim for *Niko* (2011) and *The Bleeds* (2018), Dimitri Nasrallah has written a vivid elegy to the 1980s, the years he first moved to Canada, bringing the era's systemic challenges into the current moment through this deeply endearing portrait of struggle, perseverance, and bonding.

About the Author: Dimitri Nasrallah

Dimitri Nasrallah is the author of four novels. He was born in Lebanon in 1977, and lived in Kuwait, Greece, and Dubai before moving to Canada. His internationally acclaimed books have garnered nominations for CBC Canada Reads, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and the Grand Prix du Livre de Montréal, and won the Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction and the McAuslan First Book Prize. He is the fiction editor at Véhicule Press.



About the Translator

Daniel Grenier is a writer and translator. His first novel, *L'année la plus longue* (2015), won the Prix littéraire des collégiens. In recent years, he has published two books of non-fiction and a second novel, *Françoise en dernier* (2018), in addition to signing some thirty translations of works from Canada and the United States. These include *On pleure pas au bingo* (Nobody Cries at Bingo) and *La course de Rose* (Rose's Run), by Plains Cree writer Dawn Dumont, as well as *De l'utilité de l'ennui* (The Utility of Boredom: Baseball Essays, in collaboration with William S. Messier), for which he was a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Awards for best translation. For various publishing houses, he has also translated novels and short story collections by Wallace Thurman, Dimitri Nasrallah, Bindu Suresh, Guillaume Morissette, Tamara Faith Berger, Thomas King, Norma Dunning, and others. His most recent novel, *Héroïnes et tombeaux*, was published by Hélotrope in early 2023. He lives in Quebec City with his family.

Interviews with the Author

- [Giller Book Club: Hotline](#)
- [CBC: "Hope is the more difficult path"](#)
- [Dimitri Nasrallah: Writers Unbound](#)

Works by the Author

- *Blackbodying* (2004)
- *Niko: A Novel* (2011)
- *The Bleeds* (2018)

Discussion Questions for *Hotline*

Questions about the Characters

1. The author shines a light on the single parenting experience without making it the absolute focus on the novel. How did the book do this?
2. Despite a lot of sadness and darkness, there's light in the novel too - especially when the other immigrant women (mostly mothers) come together to speak French with Muna. How does this plot development contribute to Muna's character arc?
3. Which characters did you like best? Which did you like least?
4. Which character did you relate to, or empathize with, the most?
5. Muna's newcomer experience is common for many newcomers to Canada. Do you have your own story about settling in Canada? Or how does Muna's story make you feel about the challenges for newcomers when settling in Canada? What supports do you think we could offer Canadian immigrants to better help their transition?
6. How does Muna's and her son's identity change throughout the novel?
7. One of the major themes in this novel is identity. How do you think adoption of "Mona" impacted Muna's sense of identity?
8. Muna interacts with a variety of characters during her employment as a hotline attendant. Which of these characters did you like the least? Did you find anyone particularly interesting?
9. We meet Halim through Muna's memories – what did you think of their flashback conversations/interactions?

Questions about the Plot & Setting

1. Muna is a widow. We meet her husband through her memories and her interactions with his ghost which were very different than the other scenes, very much grounded in reality. How did this impact the reading of the novel for you?
2. What do you think of Montreal in Winter being used as the main setting for the majority of the novel? Why was this significant? How did the setting impact the story? How was the setting integral to the plot?

3. Were you satisfied by the ending? What do you imagine came next for Muna and her son?
4. Muna suffers a heartbreaking betrayal by her in-laws. How do you think she handled it? What would you have done in her shoes?

Questions about your Reading Experience

1. Did reading the book impact your mood? If yes, how so?
2. What surprised you most about the book?
3. Did the book evoke any memories for you?
4. Did this book remind you of any other books?
5. How did it impact you? Do you think you'll remember it in a few months or years?
6. Would you ever consider re-reading it? Why or why not?
7. Who do you most want to read this book?
8. Are there lingering questions from the book you're still thinking about?
9. What was your favourite or least favourite part of the book?

Questions about the Author

1. Would you want to read another book by this author?
2. How do you think the author's own experiences shaped the novel?

Reviews of Hotline

Inspired by the real-life experiences of Nasrallah's mother, *Hotline* intertwines hope and sorrow to create a moving story that sears the heart, as Muna's love for her child motivates her to overcome every obstacle in her way, no matter how large. Nasrallah has written a poignant, powerful tale that pays tribute to the numerous sacrifices and accommodations immigrants make for the sake of a better life in a country that doesn't always return the favour. Zeahaa Rehman, [Quill and Quire](#)

"Fiction about immigrants tends toward melancholy and tragedy. Dimitri Nasrallah's new novel delivers something different. *Hotline* suggests that immigrant literature may be able to navigate its own course between the Scylla of despair and the Charybdis of naïveté. The problems of bootstraps narratives aside, happy endings are still worth writing." Amanda Perry, [The Walrus](#)

"A quietly transformative story, one that takes your assumptions, twists them into a shape you didn't initially see and casts them back at you in a really lovely way." Alison Manley, [Miramichi Reader](#)

Examining the complicated intersection between grief and memory, *Hotline* immerses readers in the story of a family that is trying to redefine itself after being scattered by war and immigration. Perfect for anyone who loves Montreal, misses the eighties, or, like me, wants to hear Muna's sharp and funny observations in their head, *Hotline* is a fantastic read. Grace Guy, [NNSL Media](#)

Nasrallah does a superb job cracking open Muna's point of view, interweaving her memories of Lebanon with scenes of her new life in Montreal. ... *HOTLINE* is intimate and voice-driven, yet Nasrallah creates vivid ancillary characters[.] Ami Sands Brodoff, [Montreal Review of Books](#)

Awards and Distinction

Blackbodying

Awards: Winner McAuslan First Book Prize

Finalist Grand Prix du Livre de Montréal

Niko: A Novel

Awards: Winner, 2011 Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction

Longlisted for the 2013 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award

Longlisted for CBC Canada Reads 2016

Hotline

Awards: Longlist - 2022 Scotiabank Giller Prize

Canada Reads Selection 2023

Shortlist - ReLit Awards 2023

Dimitri Nasrallah Recommends

The War You Don't Hate by Blaise Ndala : *(translated from the French by Dimitri Nasrallah)* :

This novel, which will publish in April, follows two rehabilitating child soldiers in post-war Congo, and their vendetta against a Canadian filmmaker who has made an Oscar-winning documentary about the atrocities they committed. Originally published in 2017 as *Sans capote ni kalachnikov*, Ndala's second novel won Radio-Canada's Combats des livres.

Our Lady of Mile End by Sarah Gilbert : An assured debut collection of short stories all based around the historic and gentrifying Mile End neighbourhood in Montreal.

Erasure by Percival Everett : I read this book a few months before its film adaptation, *American Fiction*, hit screens this past December. The film captures some aspects of the storyline, and none of the author's inventiveness with narrative. Read it for how Everett writes!

Readalikes for *Hotline*

If you like books that examine the immigrant experience, try reading:

On Earth we're briefly gorgeous by Ocean Vuong

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi

Brick Lane by Monica Ali

The field guide to the North American teenager by Ben Philippe

If you like stories with a strong sense of place, try reading:

Heroine by Gail Scott

Butter honey pig bread by Francesca Ekwuyasi

Roaming by Mariko Tamaki (graphic novel)

We, Jane by Aimee Wall

If you enjoy reading books by diverse authors, try reading:

Crook manifesto by Colson Whitehead

The covenant of water by A. Verghese

My sister, the serial killer by Oryinkan Braithwaite

The circle by Katherena Vermette

If you're feeling nostalgic for the 80's, try reading:

Lucien & Olivia by André Narbonne

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell

Persepolis: the story of a childhood by Marjane Satrapi (graphic novel)

Juno loves Legs by Karl Geary

Tips and Resources

How to Read a Book for a Book Club

Reading a book to discuss it is different from reading for pleasure. Ask yourself questions, read carefully, and imagine yourself in the story. Think about the style and structure of the book.

1. **Make notes and mark pages [with post-its] as you go.** This may slow your reading but saves time searching for key passages later.
2. **Ask tough questions** of yourself and the book.
3. **Analyze themes.** What is the author trying to say in the book?
4. **Get to know the characters.** Consider their faults and motives and what it would be like to know them.
5. **Notice the book's structure.** Do the chapters begin with quotes? How many people tell the story? Is the book written in flashbacks? Does the order make sense to you?
6. **Compare to other books and authors.** Themes often run through an author's works. Comparing one author's book with another's can help you decide how you feel about the book.

Adapted from: <https://www.spl.org/programs-and-services/authors-and-books/book-groups/book-group-how-tos>

Book Club Best Practices

Book clubs are a fun and engaging way to bond with other book lovers and explore new ideas and authors. By showing respect for each other and the book, we create a friendly atmosphere for discussion.

Here are a few simple rules to guide us:

1. *Take turns.* When someone has something to say about the book, we want to make sure that they are heard.

2. *Remember to talk about the book.* All of you committed to reading the book. With that in mind, let's stick to the book discussion.
3. *If you didn't read the book, that's okay.* Please participate anyway. You probably have some good general input to give, even without reading the book.
4. *Be gracious and respectful in your comments.* If you didn't like the book, consider a statement such as "This book was horrible!" might halt the conversation and be seen as disrespectful to those who did enjoy it. It's fine to say that it wasn't your favourite title. Beyond that, find constructive ways to contribute to the conversation. And remember, there are many ways of interpreting a book/passage.
5. *Bring some questions for discussion if you want.* Book clubs are always more enjoyable when members are participating and engaging with one another. Feel free to ask the group your questions.
6. *Keep an open mind.* Even if this book isn't something you think you're interested in, please give it a chance. It might surprise you. Un Livrel/One eReads Canada promotes Canadian authors and we hope to introduce you to some new favourite titles.

Credit: Oakville Public Library

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