

The Whirlpool of Lebanon

A Book Club Guide

Will Pass · Thiessen Press · 276 pages · September 15, 2026

About the book

There's something in the water in Lebanon, Kansas.

Zeb Stout is an eccentric rancher with a sick wife and a field of junkyard sculptures. As hope fades, a whirlpool appears in the pasture, offering a choice he never imagined.

Consequences ripple through Lebanon. Calves wander down Main Street. Rumors spread of impossible recoveries. Neighbors vanish. Soon the entire town is drawn to Stout Ranch, desperate to drink, to heal, to be young.

The Whirlpool of Lebanon is a surreal and darkly comic novel about love, longing, and the terrible beauty of second chances. This is what happens when a miracle arrives—and refuses to leave.

Why it's a book club pick

The Whirlpool of Lebanon asks a question every reader will want to argue about: if you found a fountain of youth, would you drink from it, share it, sell it, or keep it secret? The broader story opens discussions about mortality and aging, grief and caregiving, second chances and regret, and how a community behaves when the impossible lands in its backyard. Funny and unsettling in the same breath, the book tends to leave a room with plenty to disagree about, and at 276 pages, it's easy to finish before your next meeting.

Themes to explore: *aging and mortality; grief and caregiving; physical versus spiritual love; the ethics of a miracle; second chances and regret; community versus self-interest; hope, greed, and desperation; the decline of rural America; art and transformation.*

Discussion questions

- 1 The novel opens with an entire herd asleep in a field and a whirlpool no one can explain, all told in a plain, matter-of-fact voice. How did that deadpan style shape the way you experienced the strange events? Did the plainness make the surreal feel more believable, funnier, or both?
 - 2 At the center of the book is one impossible question: if you found water that could make you young again, would you drink it? Would you share it, sell it, or keep it a secret? Did your answer change as the story went on?
 - 3 Zeb's wife, Nancy, is dying when the whirlpool appears. How does the novel handle caregiving, grief, and the longing to undo a loved one's suffering? In Nancy's case, did the miracle feel like a gift or a cruelty?
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- 4 Lebanon, Kansas is the geographic center of the country, and a town slowly emptying as its young people leave. Why set a story about restored youth in a place that is quietly dying? What is the novel saying about small-town America?

 - 5 As the whole town is drawn to Stout Ranch, we hear from many different voices. Whose reaction to the whirlpool did you understand the most, and whose disturbed you the most? What did that range of responses reveal about people?

 - 6 Zeb builds sculptures out of welded junk, making something strange and new from what others threw away. How does his art echo what the whirlpool does, and what the book itself does with the old western and the tall tale?

 - 7 The water doesn't only heal, it takes hold of people. Some become almost enslaved to it, hungry to keep drinking and to pull others in, while Zeb holds himself apart. What lets Zeb resist when so many can't? And is youth, like money or power, something that corrupts nearly anyone who reaches for it?

 - 8 The story mixes broad comedy with real tragedy. Were there moments where you laughed and then felt uneasy about laughing? What does that blend accomplish that a straight drama or a straight comedy could not?

 - 9 The theme of second chances runs all through the book. Do the characters who get their youth back actually change, or do they repeat old mistakes? What does the novel seem to believe about whether people can truly begin again?

 - 10 Once the whirlpool appears, no one in Lebanon can leave it alone. Why is a miracle like this so hard to walk away from? What does the novel suggest about our inability to give up a second chance, even when letting go might be the wiser choice?

 - 11 Talk about the ending. Did the resolution feel earned? Did Zeb and the town end up where you expected? What did the true cost of the miracle turn out to be?

 - 12 If a whirlpool like this appeared near your town tomorrow, what do you think your community would do? What would you do?

Invite Will to your book club

Will Pass is happy to join book club discussions by video call: a short Q&A, a reading, or just talking with your group about the book. He genuinely loves it. Tell him your club's size and when you're meeting, and he'll do his best to make it work.

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