

7. George Pocock and Al Ulbrickson each stand as somewhat mythic figures in *THE BOYS IN THE BOAT*; however, they were very different men with very different relationships to the boys. Discuss their differences in leadership style and their roles within the University of Washington's rowing establishment. What about Pocock enabled him to connect with Joe Rantz on such a personal level?

8. At one point, Pocock pulls Joe aside to tell him "it wasn't just the rowing but his crewmates that he had to give himself up to, even if it meant getting his feelings hurt" (p. 235). How do you think this advice affected Joe's interactions with the other boys? How do you think it might have affected Joe's relationship to his family, especially after the deaths of Thula Rantz and his friend Charlie MacDonald?

9. What was Al Ulbrickson and Ky Ebright's relationship to the local and national media? How did they use sportswriters to advance their teams' goals and how did the sportswriters involve themselves in collegiate competition? Were you surprised at all by the level of involvement, especially that of Royal Brougham? How does it compare to collegiate sports coverage today?

10. When Al Ulbrickson retired in 1959, he mentioned that one of the highlights of his career was "the day in 1936 that he put Joe Rantz in his Olympic boat for the first time, and watched the boat take off" (p. 364). Why do you think that moment was so important for Ulbrickson? What about Joe was so special to him and how did Joe become the element that finally brought the boys of the Husky Clipper together?

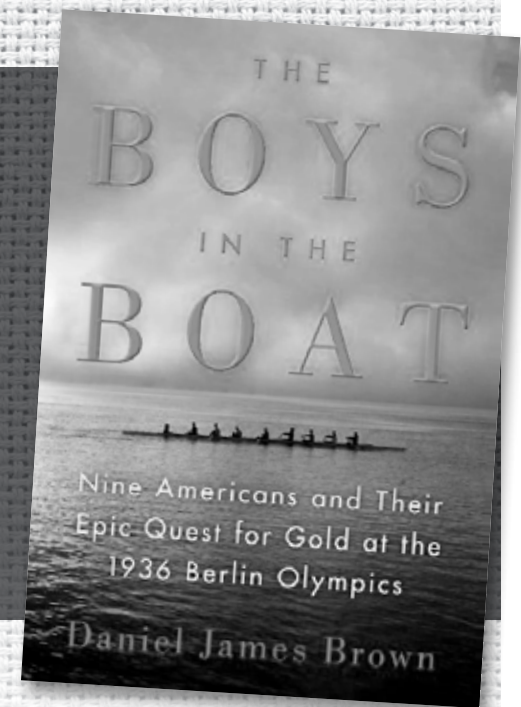
11. Later in the book, it is noted "all along Joe Rantz had figured that he was the weak link in the crew" (p. 326), but that he found out much later in life that all the other boys felt the same way. Why do you think that was? And why do you suppose they didn't reveal this to each other until they were old men?

Discussion Questions

"Cogent history . . . and a surprisingly suspenseful tale of triumph."

- *USA Today*

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Daniel James Brown grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area and attended Diablo Valley College, the University of California at Berkeley, and UCLA. I taught writing at San Jose State University and Stanford before becoming a technical writer and editor. I now write narrative nonfiction books full time. My primary interest as a writer is in bringing compelling historical events to life as vividly and accurately as I can.

I live in the country outside of Seattle, Washington with my wife, two daughters, and an assortment of cats, dogs, chickens, and honey-

bees. When I am not writing, I am likely to be birding, gardening, fly fishing, reading American history, or chasing bears away from the bee hives. (Author bio from ReadingGroupGuides.com)

Book Summary

The Boys in the Boat celebrates the 1936 U.S. men's Olympic eight-oar rowing team—nine working class boys who stormed the rowing world, transformed the sport, and galvanized the attention of millions of Americans.

The sons of loggers, shipyard workers, and farmers from the American West, the boys took on and defeated successive echelons of privilege and power. They vanquished the sons of bankers and senators rowing for elite eastern universities. They defeated the sons of British aristocrats rowing for Oxford and Cambridge. And finally, in an extraordinary race in Berlin they stunned the Aryan sons of the Nazi state as they rowed for gold in front of Adolf Hitler.

Against the grim backdrop of the Great Depression, they reaffirmed the American notion that merit, in the end, outweighs birthright. They reminded the country of what can be done when everyone quite literally pulls together. And they provided hope that in the titanic struggle that lay just ahead, the ruthless might of the Nazis would not prevail over American grit, determination, and optimism.

And even as it chronicles the boys' collective achievement, *The Boys in the Boat* is also the heart warming story of one young man in particular. Cast aside by his family at an early age, abandoned and left to fend for himself, Joe Rantz rows not just for glory, but to regain his shattered self-regard, to dare again to trust in others, and to find his way back to a place he can call home. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

1. Did you know much about rowing before reading *THE BOYS IN THE BOAT*? If not, what aspects of the sport surprised you most? If so, did you learn anything about rowing that you didn't know before? And if you don't generally follow sports or sports history, what made you want to read this book?

2. Compare how the Olympics were regarded in the 1930s to how they are regarded now. What was so significant about the boys' win in 1936, right on the dawn of the Second World War? What political significance do the Olympics Games hold today?

3. How did you feel as you were reading the book? What significance does Joe's unique point of view have for the unfolding of the narrative? And why do you think Joe was willing to discuss his life in such detail with a relative stranger?

4. What aspects of life in the 1930s struck you most deeply? How do the circumstances of Americans during the Great Depression compare to what America is facing now?

5. Despite how much time Joe Rantz spent training with the other boys during his first two years at the University of Washington, he didn't really form close personal relationships with any of them until his third year on the team. Why do you think that was? What factors finally made Joe realize that it did matter who else was in the boat with him (p. 221)?

6. Even with this guardedness, what about Al Ulbrickson inspired Joe and the boys to work their hardest? What strategies did he use to foster competition and a strong work ethic among them and why?
