RAY LOPEZ
AUTHOR • STORYTELLER
RayLbooks.com

OFFICIAL BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

Hard Knocks: Memoir of a Small Moment — By Ray Lopez • The Memoir Trilogy, Book 1

A Note from Ray

"Thank you for choosing Hard Knocks for your book club. I didn't write this book from a safe distance — I wrote it as a man who was given mercy he didn't earn, telling the truth about the boy who needed it. These are the memoirs God gave me to describe His mercy, grace, and power in my life, and stories like this only come alive when they're shared. I hope your conversation is honest. Mine had to be. — Ray"

(Drafted for Ray's approval — drawn from his own words about these books.)

Discussion Questions

Use these prompts to spark your conversation — feel free to skip around or focus on the moments that resonated most with your group.

1. First Impressions & Expectations: What drew you to Hard Knocks initially, and how did your expectations compare to where Ray's story actually went?

2. The Small Moment: Ray calls his story "a memoir of a small moment." Which small moment in the book do you think changed everything — and why?

3. The Boy He Was: He was a child alcoholic and addicted to methamphetamine by his late teens, involved in gang activity, and landed in a psychiatric hospital and jail. Where did you see adults or systems fail him — and where did you see mercy show up anyway?

4. The People Around Him: Ray writes about growing up in a predominantly white community on Long Island as the son of a Cuban mother and a Mexican/Spanish father, confronted with racism during his developmental years. How did those early experiences shape the boy he became?

5. Setting as a Character: Brooklyn, Long Island — "Strong Island, or Wrong Island," as Ray puts it — California, a cell. How do the places of this book shape its mood and its turning points? Could this story have unfolded the same way anywhere else?

6. Core Theme: Mercy: One of the central threads of Hard Knocks is mercy — Ray notes he was "spared any felony convictions." How much of his story is grace, how much is luck, and does the difference matter? Which scene illustrated it best for you?

7. Secrets & Turning Points: Ray doesn't clean anything up. Was there a moment — a reveal, a rock bottom, a rescue — that genuinely surprised you, or that you saw coming and dreaded anyway?

8. Moral Gray Areas: Ray went on to spend 35 years as a probation officer, supervising people whose lives looked like his old one. Knowing the man he becomes, were there choices by the young Ray — or by the people around him — that you found yourself sympathizing with despite everything?

9. Memorable Passage: Was there a specific line, scene, or moment that lingered with you after you put the book down? Ray has loved ghost stories and poetry since childhood — where do you see the poet's eye in the way he tells his own life?

10. Faith & Calling: Locked up at 19, Ray found Christ and says he was called to be an evangelist the moment he was saved. What do you make of a calling that arrives at a person's lowest point?

11. The Ending & Beyond: The trilogy moves through destruction, discovery, and determination. At the last page of Hard Knocks, where does each thread stand — and what do you expect Hard Love to have to heal?

12. Your Turn: Who in your life needs to read this book — and what's stopping you from handing it to them?

Enhance Your Book Club Meeting

Meeting Element	Book-Inspired Idea
Themed Refreshments	Serve cafecito (strong Cuban coffee) and guava pastelitos — a nod to Ray's Cuban mother and the kitchen-table roots of his story. Keep it coffeehouse, not cocktail: this is a redemption story, and the table should honor it.
Atmosphere & Playlist	Play the guide's playlist in the background — Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready," Aretha Franklin's "Amazing Grace," Mahalia Jackson's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," the Edwin Hawkins Singers' "Oh Happy Day," Bill Withers' "Lean on Me." The sound of the road from the streets to salvation.
Icebreaker Activity	Go around the room: in one sentence each, name the "small moment" that changed your own life. It sets the table for everything Hard Knocks is about.
Further Reading	If your group wants to keep walking with Ray, Hard Love: A California Memoir (Book 2) picks up where Hard Knocks leaves off — and The Painter, his novella based on true stories from his years as

	a federal probation officer, is a powerful one-meeting read.

Invite Ray to Your Meeting

Ray loves connecting with book clubs. If your group is reading one of his books, he would be glad to drop into your meeting via Zoom for a 15-minute Q&A — and, if your group would like, to close your time together in prayer. Request a visit through the contact form at RayLbooks.com: choose "Book Club Visit," tell us which book you read and your meeting date, and Ray will respond directly. While you're there, join his reader list for new guides, sample chapters, and signed-copy announcements.