



TRELL

DICK LEHR

ABOUT THE BOOK

The co-author of *Black Mass*, the *New York Times* bestseller about mobster Whitey Bulger, returns to Boston in a page-turning novel inspired by a true story of injustice. Romero Taylor is in prison for a sensational murder that he insists he didn't commit. Trell, his fourteen-year-old daughter, believes him, but she knows that faith alone won't set him free. She convinces a lawyer to take on his case and an investigative reporter to expose old lies. She chases down every lead that might exonerate her father—even the dangerous ones. A tough-eyed look at the justice system and the power of journalism, this gripping novel is also a loving tribute to a daughter's determination.

HC: 978-0-7636-9275-9 • Also available as an e-book and in audio



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dick Lehr was a member of the *Boston Globe's* acclaimed Spotlight Team of investigative reporters and is the co-author of *Black Mass*, a bestseller that was made into a movie starring Johnny Depp. Now a professor of journalism at Boston University, he lives near Boston with his family. This is his first novel for young adults.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used as writing prompts for independent work.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *True Grit* is the name of Trell's favorite novel. It's also a good description of her temperament. What do you think is her finest moment in this story? Why?
2. Many families fall apart during hard times. How do the Taylors keep themselves together? How are they able to overcome the practical problems and emotional strains of Romero Taylor's long incarceration?
3. Trell lives in Roxbury, a largely poor and African-American section of Boston. Why is there so much distrust of the police in her neighborhood? Should there be? Are law enforcement officers trusted in your community? Why?
4. At home in Roxbury, Trell is friendly and talkative, but when she starts at the Weld, an exclusive private school, "I basically went mute," she says (page 8). Why? What does "To Certain Intellectuals," a poem by Langston Hughes, mean to her?
5. When her advisor at the Weld School promises, "I'm here for you," Trell thinks, *Really? Here for me? You don't know anything, Mr. "I'm so hip" Rowe* (page 7). What does Mr. Rowe assume about Trell? What prejudices does he have about her community?
6. The murder of young Ruby Graham shocked the city of Boston in 1989. Why did it attract so much attention? How was the tragedy exploited by the media and by public officials? Is Trell another victim of the shooting? Why?
7. Nora Walsh is already overworked, and the Taylor family can't afford to pay her, so why does she agree to be Romero Taylor's lawyer? What makes his case so important to her?
8. "I don't like waiting," Trell says about herself. "I like moving" (page 187). Why are both important? How does patience help her to free her father? How does action?
9. This novel takes place in the early 2000s, more than a decade after the crack cocaine epidemic swept through Roxbury. How did Trell's father get caught up in the drug trade? How did crack cocaine almost destroy his community?
10. Trell's father didn't kill a little girl, but that doesn't mean that he's an innocent man. How does Trell react when she learns the extent of her father's past criminal activity? How does he explain his actions? Would you be able to forgive him if he were your father? Why?
11. Romero Taylor isn't the only character who earns a second chance in this novel. Discuss how Clemens Bittner and Detective Richard Boyle also find ways to make amends for past mistakes.
12. "I'm Thumper Parish," the confident gangster brags. "I play chess; everyone else is playin' checkers" (page 282). What are the risks of believing that you're smarter than everyone else? How do Trell and Clemens prove Thumper wrong?
13. *Quid pro quo* is a Latin phrase often used by lawyers. What does it mean? How is Thumper's agreement with Flanagan an example of quid pro quo? Discuss other instances of quid pro quo that you've seen in stories or in real life.
14. The press is sometimes called the fourth branch of government, as important to our democracy as the three official branches of government—the legislative, executive, and judicial. How does this novel validate the importance of a free press?
15. Dick Lehr, the author of *Trell*, is a journalist and a professor of journalism. What does this novel tell you about his profession? What skills does it require? What are the satisfactions of the work? What are the frustrations? Would you be a good reporter?
16. "Justice! It was like Juanda spit the word out. 'C'mon, girl'" (page 234). Why does Juanda Tillery have no faith in justice? How could her faith be restored? Does the Taylor family ultimately find justice? How?

