

Book Club Guide

The Accusation by Bandi

1. Why do you think Bandi chose fiction as the form for his denouncement of North Korean communism rather than nonfiction? In what ways can fiction be more effective than nonfiction for political purposes?
2. Bandi's stated goal is of denouncing North Korean communism. What metaphors does he use throughout the text to do so? Which are most effective?
3. In numerous stories, the North Korean state is shown to measure a person's value not only by their own actions, but also those of their family. For example, Lee Il-Cheol, the narrator of "Record of a Defection," is viewed as a "hostile element" due to the actions of his father. His nephew, Min-Hyuk, is already beginning to experience the same discrimination. How does North Korean communism's focus on family compare to other repressive regimes?
4. Besides through the judging eye of the North Korean state, how else does a focus on the family play a central role in the book?
5. How are female characters portrayed in the stories in *The Accusation*? Discuss some of the differences — for better or worse — in how women are treated under the North Korean communism that appears in the book, and under Western capitalism.
6. Part of the success of a short story is the author's ability to draw in a reader with a shorter length of text. Did any of the book's stories seem cut short? Which characters did you want to hear more from?
7. As a realist book of short stories, how does *The Accusation* compare to dissident literature from other countries that you have read? How does Bandi's choice to write short stories rather than a novel inform his message?
8. Many authors who write dissident literature make narrative choices to evade censorship. For example, much Soviet dissident literature took the form of science fiction in order to be distributed in the Soviet Union, and many works of Latin American dissident literature used magic realism — already a prevailing cultural model — for a similar purpose. Writing for an audience outside of North Korea, is Bandi's narrative more "free" than other works of dissident literature? How does writing for a censored or uncensored audience impact a book?
9. Many of the stories in *The Accusation* lead to characters coming to life-changing realizations. Despite the variety of backgrounds from which these characters emerge, are there any shared elements in these realizations?

10. How has life in North Korea changed since the mid-1990s, when the stories in the book were written? What do you think would be different in the stories if they were written today, under the leadership of Kim Jong-un instead of Kim-Il sung?