

# Southfield Public Library

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## *Black Maestro by Joe Drape*

*Discussion questions used at SPL-- February 2010*

1. Are any of you horse racing fans? Had you heard of Jimmy Winkfield before?
2. This book was full of history – of our country, of horse racing, of war -- how did it read for you? How did he do in describing the different places for you? Did you feel as though you were in different parts of the world? Or were the parts Jimmy was in the same due to it all being “horse country”?
3. What was the most interesting part of the book for you?
4. What did you think of Jimmy Winkfield? As a person, what do you think his strengths and weaknesses were?
5. What was his attitude towards the discrimination that the black jockeys faced?
6. Did the men who were in charge seem to care what color a jockey was? As a group did it seem as though all jockeys were mistreated and abused? What did you think of that saying that all men were equal on the turf or under it? True?
7. Why do you think Jimmy became a jockey? Was it happenstance? Do you think some people are born to be a specific type of person – much like Jimmy seemed destined to be a jockey?
8. What did you think of his relationships with women? From what you know of Jimmy, was the author successful in passing along the attraction that seemed to draw women to him? Which wife/relationship was the most successful in your opinion?
9. What did you think of his leaving the United States? (p 93) (117). What were his options?
10. What was his life in Poland/Russia like? What were his highs and his lows?
11. What do you think of his relationship with Michael Lazarev (128+)

12. Why do you think he was so well liked by the owners and trainers? (p 155)
13. What about his next boss, Prince Lubomirsky?
14. Why do you think Jimmy considered himself a Russian?
15. What did you think of that adventure of taking the horses from Austria to Poland?  
Who ever knew about things like that?? (p 188)
16. How would you rate him as a father? How did he rate himself, according to the author? Do you feel as though he made some amends for the way he ignored his children when they were older? Was his wife Lydie any more involved as a parent?
17. Why do you think he left Alexandra and George behind in Russia? (p 183) Did it seem like an acceptable reason to you?
18. What did you think of his life in Paris? (p199) What did you think when Alexandria and George showed up in Paris? Was he able to make up for lost time with his son George? (p 220)
19. How do you think Jimmy felt about returning to America? How did it affect his children?
20. Did he hold horses above people?
21. What was the most heroic thing Jimmy did? Was there anything he did that you would classify as cowardly?
22. Where do you think he was happiest?
23. What was the most compelling story in this book for you?
24. Did you read the author's notes at the end of the book? Did they make you want to read more about Jimmy? Or about horse racing?
25. Could you see this being a movie? Who would you have as the actors?
26. Would you recommend this book to someone?

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## *General discussion questions*

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?