



## Close Call Book Group Discussion Questions

As the title suggests, many of these stories center around “near misses” either literal or figurative. In which stories, are the stakes highest? Do any of the situations resonate more strongly with you from this standpoint than others? Why?

Some of the stories address tough issues in our society today. Do any of them make you uncomfortable? Do any of them help you see an issue through a new lens? Which one(s)? Why?

With which of the characters do you most closely identify? For which ones is it most challenging to find empathy? Why?

Some of the stories are told from a child’s perspective or through the perspective of an adult looking back on childhood or adolescence. What elements of those stories resonate with you? If you were writing looking at a time in childhood, what themes/experiences would you explore?

If you were to create a film version of one of the stories, which would it be and who would be on the cast list? Why?

This collection includes a variety of forms for telling a story—text messages, play scripts, prayer chain posts, an obituary, etc. How does this impact your experience as a reader? Do you prefer the more traditional stories to the more experimental or vice versa? Why?

Sometimes, the most satisfying story endings aren’t “happily-ever-after” but those with an element of “inevitable surprise,” the sense that, though we didn’t predict the ending, upon retrospect, we probably could have. Did any of these stories provide an “inevitable surprise” for you? Which one(s)? Why, in retrospect, did the story “have to” end in the way it did?

Readers who enjoy longer fiction sometimes feel that short stories end before the reader is ready. Which—if any—of the stories would you like to see explored in a longer form?

These stories have been described as capturing “the searching soul of the Midwest.” Do you agree there is a Midwestern aesthetic/voice? If so, how does (or doesn’t) this collection capture it?