

Volunteers: A Memoir

by Jerad W. Alexander

Questions for Discussion

1. Much of this book describes the author's experiences as a child growing up on military bases. What are some of the things that he loved about this experience? Do you think his depictions are accurate? Surprising?
2. How was Jerad Alexander's desire to join the military influenced by representations of war in American culture? At any point in your life, did you consider joining the military? If so, what motivated you to do so? If not, what factors pushed you in other directions?
3. When you think of the word *patriotism*, what is the first image that comes to mind?
4. Do you believe patriotism is a required trait for a person to serve in the military? Discuss ways a person could demonstrate patriotism *without* serving in the armed forces.
5. When the author's stepdad leaves the base to serve in the Persian Gulf War, young Jerad recounts watching the war unfold on television. Reflect on his observations and reenactments of these images. What effect do you think televised representation of war has on children? Do you believe children should be taught lessons about war? If so, what do you think they should be taught?
6. Do you believe war is ever necessary? If so, when is it necessary? When is it not?
7. The author includes many descriptions of guns and other weaponry, both toys and real weapons, from his childhood. Discuss the ways firearms are used as representations of manhood. Do you believe Americans think gun ownership or simply the use of guns represents the ideal image of a man in American culture?
8. How has the military been commodified in American culture?
9. Did you support (or refuse to support) the decision to enter the Iraq War? How much of that decision was based on your emotions or political beliefs, and how much was based on the information you ingested?

10. Do you believe the population of a country should be required to make sacrifices for the wars its country fights? How much sacrifice is enough, and how much is too much?
11. How does the United States demonstrate how much it values the efforts of the members currently serving in the armed forces?
12. Why do you think this book is called *Volunteers*? What is the author trying to say about the experience of those who choose to enlist in the US military?
13. Did any member of your family serve in the armed forces? If so, talk about what they did and what you remember of that experience. How is their experience different from the experience of the author's family?
14. What other books or films about military service and war would you like to recommend to the group, and what did you find most compelling about these works?