

Skaneateles Library
Books by the Stack
Discussion Questions

Hillbilly Elegy
by J. D. Vance

1. In what way is the Appalachian culture described in *Hillbilly Elegy* a culture in trouble?

2. Vance suggests that unemployment and addiction are self-inflicted and that the Appalachian culture is one of "learned helplessness"—individuals feel they can do nothing to improve their circumstances. Do you agree with Vance's assessment?

3. What are the positive values of the culture Vance talks about in *Hillbilly Elegy*?

4. The author's mother is arguably the book's most powerful figure. Describe her and her struggle with addiction. How did the violence between her own parents affect her own adulthood?

5. To what—or to whom—does Vance attribute this escape from the cycle of addiction and poverty?

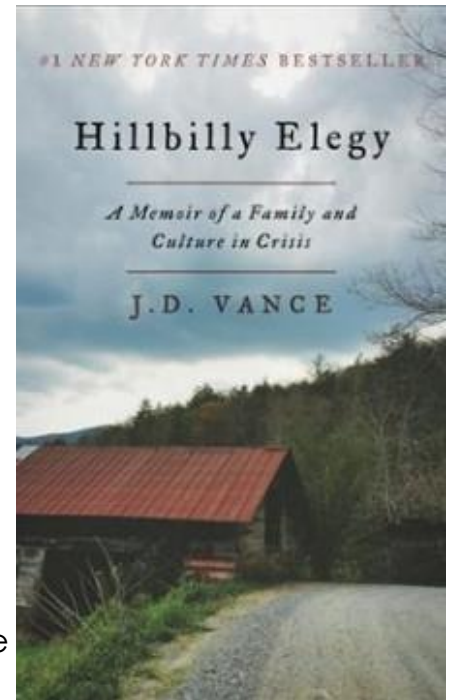
6. Talk about Vance's own resentment toward his neighbors who were on welfare but owned cellphones.

7. Critics of *Hillbilly Elegy* accuse Vance of "blaming the victim" rather than providing a sound analysis of the structural issues left unaddressed by government. What do you think?

8. What does this book bring to the national conversation about poverty—its roots and its persistence? Does Vance raise the tone of discourse or lower it?

9. After reading *Hillbilly Elegy* did your ideas about Appalachian culture change?

10. Would you recommend others read this book?



Discussion questions adapted from those on [LitLovers.com](https://www.litlovers.com)