

American Literature (11th Grade)
Summer Reading Assignment – *Beautiful Boy* by David Sheff

Respond to the questions below in paragraph form. Write in complete sentences (capitalization and punctuation). This work is due the first day of school. Be prepared to take a test on the book as well.

1. Discuss Nic's upbringing. What privileges did he have? What disadvantages? Did Sheff seem to you a "good parent"?
2. How does the integration of pop culture references—quotes from literature, song lyrics, movie dialogue—contribute to the book? Look particularly at what Sheff used as the epilogues to each section of the book: John Lennon, Kurt Cobain for Part I, Shakespeare for Part II, etc. Why might Sheff have chosen these particular passages? How do they help your understanding of events, and of Sheff's mindset?
3. When David smoked pot with Nic, what was your reaction?
4. In his suicide note, Kurt Cobain quoted Neil Young and wrote "It's better to burn out than to fade away." When Sheff interviewed John Lennon, Lennon said, "I worship the people who survive. I'll take the living and the healthy" (p. 118). Who do you agree with, Cobain or Lennon? Why does society glamorize those rock stars and other artists who burn out? Nic Sheff's glamorization of alcoholics and drug-addicted artists ostensibly contributed to his own downfall. How should we counsel children and young adults on the dangers of idolizing such people?
5. A recovering addict tells Sheff, "You will believe in God before this over" (p. 133). Later, Sheff quotes John Lennon, "God is a concept by which we measure our pain" (p. 256). What does this last statement mean? How do David and Nic each come to believe in a higher power? Discuss their struggle with faith and their ultimate understanding of God.
6. After David Sheff suffers a cerebral hemorrhage, he can't remember his own name, but he cannot forget Nic and his worry over his son. What is the extent of the damage of the hemorrhage? What good comes out of it?
7. What toll does Nic's addiction take on Jasper and Daisy? How do David and Karen help them to understand their brother's behavior?
8. At the end of his memoir, Sheff writes, "Now I am in my own program to recover from my addiction to [Nic's addiction]" (p. 305). How is Sheff addicted to Nic's addiction? How does David's addiction affect his family, his job, and his life? What is his program for recovery?