



## *The Slap by Christos Tsiolkas*

---

### **About the author:**

Christos Tsiolkas is the author of *Loaded*, which was made into the feature film *Head-On*; *The Jesus Man*; and *Dead Europe*, which won the 2006 Age Fiction Prize and the 2006 Melbourne Best Writing Award. *The Slap* was short-listed for the Miles Franklin Award and won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, the Australian Literary Society's Gold Medal. Tsiolkas is also a playwright, essayist, and screenwriter. He lives in Melbourne.

Source: Penguin (<http://www.penguin.com/>)

### **About this book:**

On a summer afternoon in a Melbourne suburb, friends, family, and neighbors gather at Hector and Aisha's home for a backyard barbecue. The children play together while the adults drink beer, sample Hector's mother's Greek specialties, and debate school systems. As the lazy hours while away, tensions mount: Disagreements and longstanding differences flare between guests. The children quarrel over toys and videos. Hector is on edge waiting for his teenage mistress to arrive and takes some speed with a friend of a friend. Then Hugo, the wayward child of Aisha's childhood friend Rosie, throws a tantrum. Hector's cousin Harry, trying to protect his own child from Hugo's violent outburst, slaps him. The stunned silence of the onlookers is only the first sign of the shock and outrage that ripples through the community.

The following chapters, each told from the point of view of one of the barbecue guests, depict what happens next. Police are called to the scene. Rosie and her

April 2016



husband Gary press charges despite Harry's and Hector's urgings to settle it between the families. Harry, a wealthy businessman, hires a well-connected lawyer to represent him, while his working-class accusers, increasingly embittered and seeking justice, end up with a court-appointed attorney. On trial are not just the slap and the moral question of whether any adult is ever justified in hitting a child, but also the values and lifestyle choices of the accusers, who live in public housing and still breastfeed their three-year-old. In the days leading up to the trial, Hector's family and Aisha's friends start taking sides, pressing the already strained marriage to a crisis point and endangering the goodwill of everyone involved.

In the meantime, Hector's teenage paramour Connie and her gay best friend Richie, who both babysit for the troubled child, find themselves wrapped up in the case—and the adult concerns surrounding it—in ways they hadn't anticipated.

With unflinching insight and ambitious scope, Tsiolkas's novel sympathetically delves into the underbelly of middle-class suburban life, exploring the drug use, racism, extramarital lust, domestic violence, alcoholism, and crippling jealousy that plague his intersecting cast of characters. Tsiolkas effortlessly slips in and out of their widely varying perspectives, laying bare their most difficult truths. Brutal and compelling, *The Slap* portrays a world where the natural human yearning for safety and security is always threatened by a darker current of destruction and desire.

Source: Penguin (<http://www.penguin.com/>)

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. As you read this book, what was your response when Harry slaps Hugo at the barbecue? How would you have responded if this event took place in your own



backyard?

2. Tsiolkas has chosen to tell his story—or arguably, stories—from the perspective of different characters, devoting a chapter to each. What does telling the story through these different perspectives accomplish that a single narrative point of view can't?
3. In Tsiolkas' *Melbourne*, most of the characters are doing drugs on a regular or casual basis. Is there a narrative purpose for this or is he merely reflecting reality?
4. Most of the families in the community depicted in *The Slap* seem to be upwardly mobile, with some characters resisting bourgeois stereotypes. Is money a positive or corrupting influence for the characters in this book?
5. Besides the fact that they were each present at the barbecue, what else do these seemingly disparate characters have in common with one another?
6. Throughout the book the characters debate a simple moral question: whether an adult can or should lay hands on a child under any circumstances. Where do you stand with regard to this issue? Which characters do you agree with?
7. In a moment of overwhelming emotion, Connie tells her friend Richie an explosive secret that is a lie—or at least an exaggeration of the truth. What, in your opinion, prompts her to do this?
8. The saying goes that “blood is thicker than water”—meaning, family loyalty is stronger than any other. Is that true for the characters in this book? If so, how?

April 2016



9. In this novel, each of the characters offers his or her own version of the truth—tinted, of course, by his or her own motives and feelings. Which did you find most compelling or most believable?
  
10. When Aisha and Hector hit a bump in their marriage, Aisha has an epiphany: “Love, at its core, was negotiation, the surrender of two individuals to the messy, banal domestic realities of sharing a life together.” How does this theme play out among other relationships in the book?
  
11. Are any of the characters in *The Slap* happy with their life choices? Do any have the potential for happiness? If so, how?

Source: Penguin (<http://www.penguin.com/>)

**Other formats available at Halifax Public Libraries:**

- Audiobook (on CD)
- DVD (Adaptation)
- eBook