

The Least of Us
Sam Quinones

The following questions are intended to enhance your discussion of Sam Quinones's *The Least of Us*.

About This Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Dreamland*, a searing follow-up that explores the terrifying next stages of the opioid epidemic and the quiet yet ardent stories of community repair.

Sam Quinones traveled from Mexico, to the boardrooms of Big Pharma, to main streets across the U.S. to create *Dreamland*, a groundbreaking portrait of the opioid epidemic. As the nation struggled to put back the pieces, Quinones was among the first to see the dangers that lay ahead: synthetic drugs and a new generation of kingpins whose product could be made in Magic Bullet blenders. In fentanyl, traffickers landed a painkiller more powerful than morphine. They laced it into cocaine, meth, and marijuana, causing tens of thousands of deaths. At the same time, Mexican traffickers made methamphetamine cheaper and more potent than ever, leading to a rise in emergent cases of mental illness and, in response, Sam argues, an uptick in homelessness across the United States.

Quinones hit the road to investigate these new threats, discovering how addiction is exacerbated by consumer-product corporations. "In a time when drug traffickers act like corporations and corporations like traffickers," he writes, "our best defense, perhaps our only defense, lies in bolstering community." Amid a tattered landscape of despair, Quinones found hope in those embracing the forgotten and ignored, illuminating the striking truth that we are only as strong as our most vulnerable.

Weaving analysis of the drug trade into stories of humble communities, *The Least of Us* delivers an unexpected and awe-inspiring response to the call that shocked the nation in Sam Quinones's award-winning *Dreamland*.

For discussion

1. Think about the title, *The Least of Us*. Who do you think Quinones is referring to in the title?
2. Humans have known that opium acts as an effective but highly addictive painkiller for millennia. What's new about the opioid crisis in America?
3. How are the new opiates being made? Why is this a cause for concern?
4. What is fentanyl? Why is it dangerous?
5. Why is the opioid crisis called a silent epidemic? What contributes to the silence around it?
6. What is the danger of mixing fentanyl with other addictive substances?
7. What is the significance of Quinones talking about Janssen's list of all the theoretical compounds that could come from fentanyl?
8. Recount one or two personal stories of drug addiction in the book. What was Quinones's reason for including so many personal angles in the book?

9. Recount one or two stories of towns coming together to find a solution to the opioid crisis. What did they do differently? Who did they rely on? What do these stories say about our ability to solve America's opiate epidemic?
10. How is the Sackler family involved with the opioid crisis?
11. What is McKinsey? How is it connected to the opiate epidemic? Discuss how consulting firms fit into Quinones's description of America as a place where drug traffickers act like multinational companies, and multinational companies act like drug traffickers.
12. What is P2P methamphetamine? How is it different from the meth that came before? How is it different from fentanyl? Why is it dangerous?
13. A lot of the stories we read about are set in small-town America, where industry has declined. Talk about how this decline and economic depression can affect how people react to large amounts of opiates flooding the market.
14. What are drug courts? How can they be helpful?
15. What are some solutions to the opioid epidemic in America, based on what Quinones has presented in the book? Do you agree with these solutions?
16. What can this book teach us about caring for the drug addicts and the homeless people we might see on the streets?