



## ***Too Short to Box with God*** **By Matthew Johnson**

### Book Club Discussion Guide and Reflection Questions

- Figures like Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali challenged social, political and racial norms by their actions and speech inside and outside of the ring. In what ways do the poems in *Too Short to Box with God* capture their roles as trailblazers and pioneers for justice and equality? How do the poems in the collection reflect how boxers, and athletes in general, can serve as movements for social change? Poems to read and consider include, “The Dilemma of Rooting for Jack Johnson,” “The Night Joe Louis Defeated Max Schmeling,” and “I Enjoy Little, Brown Clay.”
- Boxing is often associated with a particular type of masculinity, which could be described as stoic and aggressive. How do the poems in *Too Short to Box with God* address the complexities of masculinity in the world of boxing? Are there moments where this traditional view of masculinity is challenged or deconstructed? Poems to read and consider include, “The Labors and Toll of Fighting During the Trojan War” and “We Tell the Sad Stories of Aging Boxers.”
- Boxing is often used as a metaphor for larger struggles in life. How do the poems in *Too Short to Box with God* draw parallels between the physical battles in the ring and personal or societal struggles outside of it? Are there moments in the poetry collection where boxing is used as a lens to explore ideas outside of sport, such as vulnerability or survival? Poems to read and consider include, “The Life and Resistance of Tom Molineaux” and “When The Hurricane Passed: Rubin Carter.”
- *Too Short to Box with God* spans different eras of boxing, from Joe Louis to Mike Tyson. How do the poems reflect the evolution of the boxer’s image? How does the treatment of boxers in the collection reflect the changing landscape of fame and identity? Poems to read and consider include, “Sugar Ray Robinson” and “Ordering Mike Tyson Fights on Pay-Per-View.”
- How do the poems in *Too Short to Box with God* address the ways in which boxing has trickled into popular culture and collective memory? How do references to movies like *Rocky* or the *Coming to America* barbershop scene reveal the way boxing continues to shape our perceptions of and identity? Poems to read and consider include, “Debating the Four Kings” and “Musings at the Rocky Statue.”
- Boxing, as a violent sport, contains elements of both destruction and beauty. How do the poems in *Too Short to Box with God* balance these extremes? Are there instances where the violence of boxing is portrayed as beautiful, or conversely, where the beauty of the sport is undercut by its brutality? Poems to read and consider include, “The Manassas Mauler on the Canvas” and “The Phantom Punch.”