

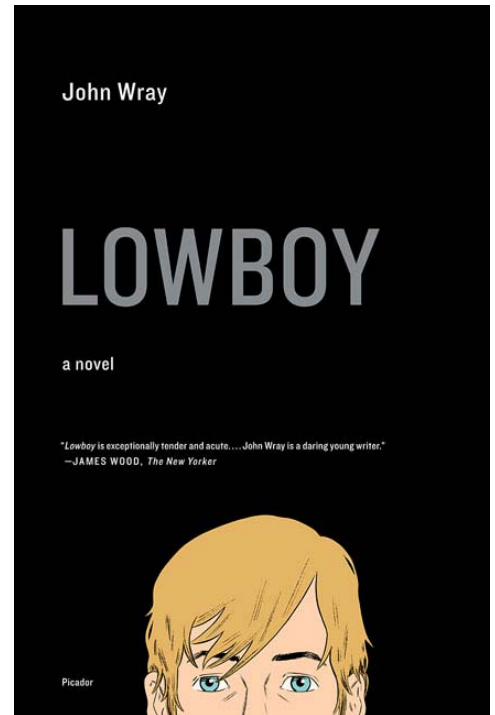
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *Lowboy*

*A Novel*

*by John Wray*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Lowboy* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Lowboy*.

### About the Book

Early one morning in New York City, Will Heller, a sixteen-year-old paranoid schizophrenic, gets on an uptown B train alone. Will is on a mission to save the world from global warming—to do it, though, he'll need to cool down his own body first. And for that he'll need one willing girl.

*Lowboy* tells the story of Will's odyssey through the city's tunnels, back alleys, and streets in search of Emily Wallace, his one great hope. It also follows his mother, Violet Heller, as she tries desperately to find her son before psychosis claims him completely. Violet is joined by Ali

Lateef, a missing-persons specialist, who learns over the course of the day that more is at stake than the recovery of a runaway teen: Will Heller has a chilling case history, and Violet—beautiful, enigmatic, and as tormented as her son—harbors a secret that Lateef will discover at his own peril.

## About the Author

**John Wray** is the author of two critically acclaimed novels, *The Right Hand of Sleep* and *Canaan's Tongue*. He was named one of *Granta* magazine's Best of Young American Novelists in 2007. The recipient of a Whiting Award, he lives in Brooklyn, New York.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the author demonstrate in writing what Will is going through, what the world looks and feels like to him? How does the tone and style in Will's sections differ from the sections that follow Lateef or Violet?
2. How much responsibility do you think Violet bears for what happens to her son? How much of his behavior is genetically driven, and how much is a result of Violet's influence and the circumstances of his upbringing?
3. Look at the scene in the cupcake shop on pages 130-133. What goes wrong in Will's communication with the girl behind the counter that sets him off? What are some of the triggers throughout the story that cause Will to lose touch with the world as others see it?
4. How did your thoughts about Violet change over the course of the novel? What clues did the author give that she might not be what she seemed? Have you ever known someone who concealed a mental illness from the people in his or her life?
5. What attracts Will to the subway?
6. What were your impressions of Dr. Kopeck? Do you think he has Will's best interests at heart? What are some of the challenges that might arise in treating a patient like Will?
7. On page 157 we learn that Lateef "hadn't been able to make up his mind to catch [Will and Emily]. He still couldn't make up his mind?" What's holding him back? What's particularly difficult about this case for him? Do you see any connection between the relationship between Will and Violet and Lateef's own upbringing?
8. What kind of portrait does the novel give of New York City? Do you think the city itself has a strong influence on the deterioration of Will's mind?
9. What draws Emily to Will? Why does she agree to see him—and travel with him over the course of the day—despite his earlier behavior?

10. How do you interpret Will's markings in the magazine Violet finds in his room? Why do you think he connects sex to the idea of global warming and saving the world? Does any of this trace back to his life with Violet or his time in the hospital?

11. Will's illness often prevents him from seeing essential things about the world around him, but he also has sensitivities that other people lack. Do you see signs that Will is gifted, as well as disturbed? What elements of the world does he pick up on that others are likely to miss?

12. What do you think happened to Will in the hospital? Does the account of his time there line up with your understanding of how patients are treated in mental hospitals? How well do you think our health care system provides for people with mental illness?

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