

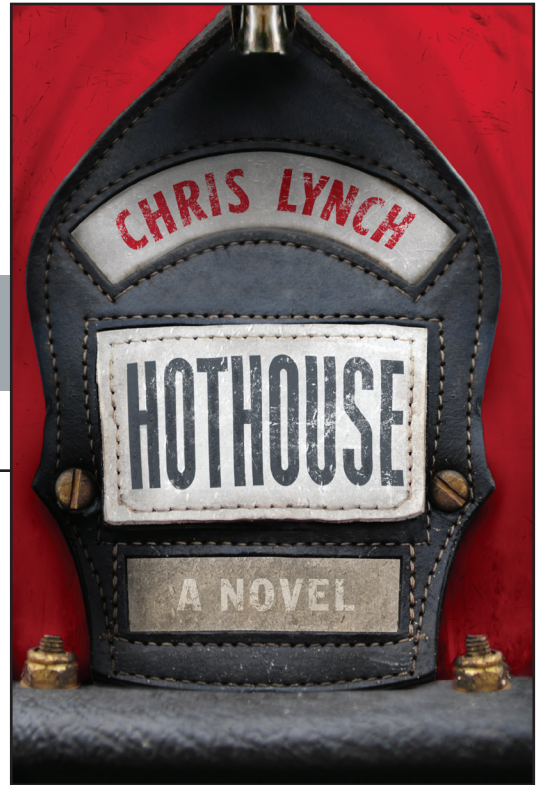
# HOTHOUSE

By Chris Lynch

## Discussion Guide

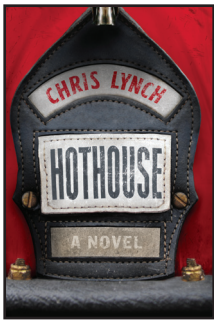
### About the Book

Russell and DJ have been best friends for most of their lives—and so have their fathers, firemen at the station known as the Hothouse. When their fathers die in a fire, Russell draws comfort and solace from the celebration of the fallen heroes, while DJ would just as soon put it in the past. Russell has always wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and become a firefighter, too, and his resolve has never wavered—at least, not until the autopsy results cast a cloud of suspicion over the memory of the so-called heroes.



### Discussion Questions

1. What does Russell mean when he thinks, “There is a big hole in the world that is the size and shape of my father. I intend to fill that hole” (page 17)? Does Russell want to be a fireman simply because his father was one? Explain.
2. Russell’s father often views sports as a metaphor for life. How is such an outlook a chiefly masculine means of looking at the world? How is the male perspective key to the events and themes of the novel?
3. Russell’s dad says, “You might not know what you want. It’s a father’s job, maybe about his biggest job, to help his boy get to the place where he knows what he wants” (page 117). Do you agree with this statement? What do you think are a father’s most important jobs?
4. “All firefighters are in pain” (page 126). Discuss the various kinds of pain and ways that people deal with pain. Why do some people choose destructive methods of coping with pain, while others choose more constructive means?
5. “Outrageous Courageous” is the phrase coined to describe the actions of Russell’s and DJ’s fathers. Compare and contrast how Russell and DJ feel about this representation.
6. Why does DJ resent the public view of his father? How has it affected his grieving process?
7. DJ implies that people need heroes even to the point of fabricating them. Do you agree? Why or why not? What role do heroes serve for the general public?
8. Russell allows popular opinion to temper his affection for his father’s memory. Discuss how Russell’s feelings for his father grow and change over the course of the story.
9. Russell says of his father, “He spent a great deal of time being truly heroic, before he wasn’t” (page 163). What do you think he means? How do you measure the worth of a life? Can one horrible mistake wipe out a lifetime of good deeds? Explain.
10. Following his dedication of a song on the radio to Mrs. Kotsopolis, Russell refuses the disc jockey’s invitation to reveal his inner turmoil to the public. Discuss how this refusal parallels DJ’s frustration with the culture of celebrity and gossip.
11. Why is it so hard for Russell—and often people in general—to deal with truth?



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### Discussion Questions (continued)

12. How can small choices mean the difference between heroism and cowardice? How do Russell's and DJ's choices, as well as those of their fathers, affect their fates in the novel?
13. How does Chris Lynch use flashbacks to complicate the character of Russell's father and the mystery of his death?
14. How does the book's title play on the themes of the novel? How are the chapter headings significant?

### Extension Activities

1. **Interview a Firefighter.** Make an appointment to visit your local fire station. As you tour the facility, ask questions about the dangers of the job, the necessary mental and physical preparation, the atypical work schedule, how the job affects family life, and the camaraderie between firefighters.
2. **Make a Heroic Video.** What makes a hero? Select a hero (or group of heroes) who inspire you. Find various digital images of your hero, choose appropriate music, and use a digital storytelling program to create a video. Share your video with others by uploading it to YouTube or another video sharing website.
3. **Research a Namesake.** Russell is named after DJ's father, while DJ is named after Russell's father. It is common practice to name children after family members, honored friends, or even famous people. Find someone in your family who has a namesake and learn more about the person—and the story—behind the name.
4. **Write a Hero.** There are many occupations—firefighter, police officer, soldier, etc.—that require a person to risk his or her personal safety for the public good. Reflect on how you benefit from the sacrifices of these heroes and write a letter expressing your gratitude. Your letter can be addressed to a specific person or to a general occupation.

### About the Author



Dave Chester, 2007

**Chris Lynch** is a National Book Award finalist and Printz Honor author who has written many acclaimed novels for young adults, including *The Big Game of Everything* and *Freewill*. He holds an M.F.A. from the writing program at Emerson College and mentors aspiring young writers. Chris Lynch lives in Boston and Scotland. Please visit him online at [www.chrislynchbooks.com](http://www.chrislynchbooks.com).

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