



WHAT HELL IS NOT

Alessandro D'Avenia

Sicily, 1993. Fear rules the streets of Palermo. Teenage boys patrol the narrow streets armed with AK-47's, marking out the territory of their mafia bosses. Federico, a privileged local boy, is asked by his teacher, Don Pino, to help out at the youth club he runs in one of the most destitute areas of the city. A tangle of alleys controlled by men with nicknames like the Hunter, it is also where kids like Francesco, Lucia, and Totò never give up hope for a different life. Over that long hot summer, far removed from his familiar surroundings, a new world opens up for Federico, but when Don Pino is murdered, the future of the kids is entrusted to his young hands. Alessandro D'Avenia explores the themes of crime, love, altruism and faith in the heart-rending novel, based on true events. The questions below are designed to enhance your discussion of *What Hell is Not*.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Alessandro D'Avenia portray gang culture in this novel?
2. Discuss Don Pino and Federico's relationship.
3. How does Don Pino's murder impact Federico?
4. Do you think Don Pino's motives are truly altruistic?
5. In what way does Don Pino and Federico's actions transform the lives of the children?
6. This novel is based on true events, do you think Alessandro D'Avenia has written a realistic portrayal of the real people?
7. Does knowing that the novel is based on true events change your perception of it?
8. How does Federico's world expand/change from working at the youth club?
9. What do you think about his choice to stay at the youth club, versus the opportunity to go to Oxford University?
10. What do you think about the characters who appear in this novel? In your opinion, which one goes through the biggest transformation?