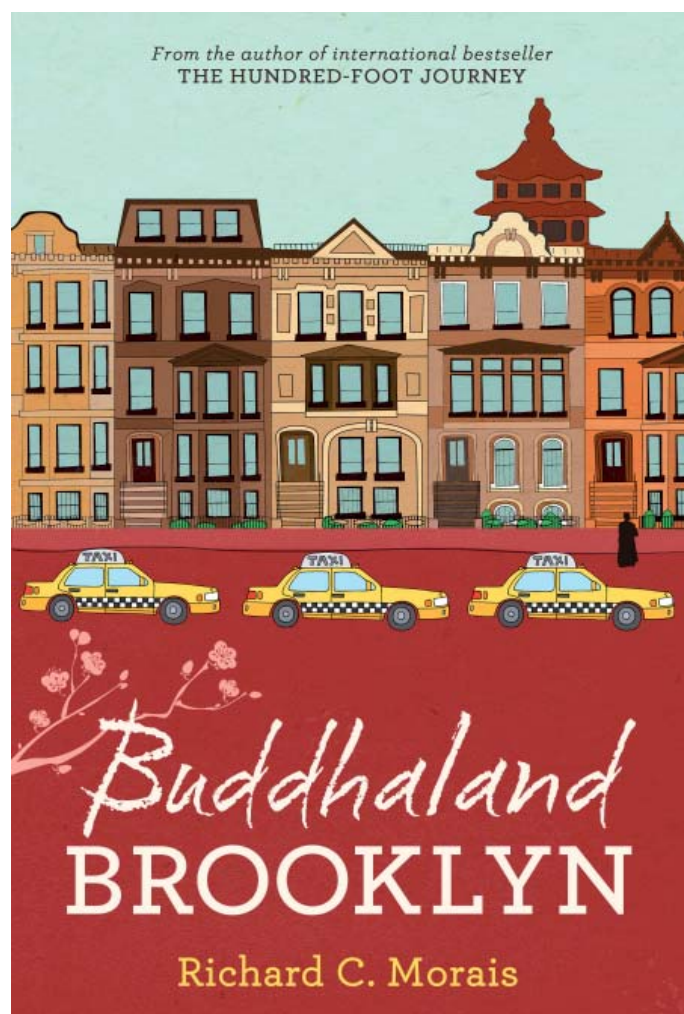


ALLEN & UNWIN



# READING GROUP NOTES

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## About the book

Growing up in a quaint mountainside village in Japan, eleven-year-old Oda leaves his family to study with the monks at a nearby Buddhist temple. From that time, this quiet and peaceful refuge is the only home the monk has ever known until his fortieth birthday draws near and he is ordered by his superior to cross the ocean and open a temple in Brooklyn.

Torn from the serene life of his homeland temple, New York proves a severe shock to Oda's system. More than that, he has to work with a motley crew of American Buddhists whose misguided practices lead to a host of hilarious cultural misunderstandings. It is only when the curmudgeonly Oda comes to appreciate this new and surprising flock, flaws and all, that he sees his own shortcomings and finally finds that sense of belonging he has always sought.

Funny, rich and entertaining, this is a charming story about the meaning and rewards of true acceptance in the unlikeliest of places.

## About the author

Richard C. Morais, author of *The Hundred-Foot Journey*, is the editor of *Barron's Penta*, a quarterly magazine and website providing advice to wealthy families. An American raised in Switzerland, he was stationed in London for eighteen years, where he was *Forbes'* European bureau chief. He lives in New York.

## Author, Richard C. Morais, on *Buddhaland Brooklyn*

*Amarcord*, the amusing autobiographical film by the late Italian director, Federico Fellini, and Oruga Haru (*The Year of My Life*), a slim volume of haiku and verse by the 18th century Buddhist poet-priest, Issa, are unusual artistic creations – from entirely different epochs and mediums and cultures – that have one core element in common: both are nostalgic fictional memoirs that condense an entire life into a symbolic year progressing through the seasons. Inspired by these works, Richard C. Morais has written *Buddhaland Brooklyn*.

## Reviews & Quotes

'...a complex, beautiful book that lingers in the imagination long after the last line is read.' - Robin Black, author of *If I Loved You, I Would Tell You This*

'A lively, vivid novel, *Buddhaland Brooklyn* stirs from the very first page. This is an entertaining and edifying meditation on the meaning and rewards of true acceptance.' - *Goodreads*

'The world Morais creates for Oda and the reader is quirky and enchanting. His recurring rumination on the meaning of enlightenment and acceptance is worth savoring.' - *Washington Independent Review of Books*

'Eloquent, unique, funny, tender, sad, and pristine in its delivery...' - Claudia Robinson, *Luxury Reading*

'Morais has written a fascinating, and original, story about religion, loneliness and cross-cultural confusion, all the while employing a deftness of touch and a great eye for story.' - Walter Mason, *Universal Heart Book Club*

'Readers who follow Morais's lyrical narrative will find spiritual redemption of their own in his search for the paradisiacal Buddhaland.' - *Shelf Awareness* (Starred Review).

'A gentle Buddhist priest from Japan is given the task of building a temple in the Little Calabria section of Brooklyn, and the results are both calamitous and sweet. Morais writes with sensitivity and insight about the many ways American life challenges the Reverend Oda's equanimity.' - *Kirkus Reviews*

## For discussion

- ☞ Oda's mother had taught him to feel 'a visceral disgust for Americans, those bumbling barbarians who had somehow defeated Japan.' The fact that Oda is being sent to Brooklyn is apparently a setup for a comedy of culture clash. Discuss how Richard C. Morais deals with this clash?
- ☞ *Buddhaland Brooklyn* is Richard C. Morais's second novel. His first, *The Hundred Foot Journey*, also features a clash of two different cultures. In both, food, and the smells and sights of villages and cities are rendered beautifully. Have you read other novels that feature the coming together and eventual understanding of two different cultures?
- ☞ The spiritual journey of Oda is an integral part of this novel. It is this that gives *Buddhaland Brooklyn* a pleasing gravity. Do you agree? Discuss.
- ☞ Every novel is, at its heart, about the human condition. Can you apply this statement to *Buddhaland Brooklyn*?
- ☞ Richard C. Morais writes that he was influenced by a Federico Fellini film and a volume of 18th century haiku (see previous notes). These sources gave him the structure for *Buddhaland Brooklyn*. Do you believe the year-long narrative divided into seasons was effective? In what other ways might Oda's story have been told?
- ☞ Discuss the imagery in the novel that particularly appeals to you as well as the imagery that doesn't.
- ☞ The reader is strongly connected with Oda and his viewpoint. Do you think that a knowledge of Buddhism would bring to the reader a deeper understanding of this character?

## Suggested Reading

*The Hundred Foot Journey* by Richard C. Morais

*Destination Saigon* by Walter Mason (non-fiction)

*Fishing for Tigers* by Emily Maguire

*Dogs at the Perimeter* by Madeleine Thien

*A Teaspoon of Earth and Sea* by Dina Nayeri