

**Joseph Luzzi**  
***The Unbearable Lightness of Being***  
**Virtual Book Club • June 2, 2022 • Reader's Guide\* • © Joseph Luzzi**

*Please note: the below are only intended to help you “get inside” the book—please do not feel compelled to answer them in full, unless you wish to, and if there are questions or elements in the book that you don't understand, no worries, we will explain all when we meet for our Live Presentation on this new selection!*

1. How would you describe the *genre* of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*? What, if any, books that you have read does it remind you of? If you had to choose one particular word to describe or classify this novel, would that word be?
2. The novel begins with an extended reflection on Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of “eternal return.” What is this philosophical concept, and why is it so central to Kundera's book as a whole?
3. Why is the relation between “lightness” and “weight” such a crucial one in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*? How have other novels that we have read in the VBC directly or indirectly dealt with this tension or related ones?
4. Early on in the novel, we read:

*I have been thinking about Tomas for many years. But only in the light of these reflections did I see him clearly. I saw him standing at the window of his flat and looking across the courtyard at the opposite walls, not knowing what to do.*

What is significant about the author Kundera interjecting himself into the narrative of the book in this manner? More broadly, what does the passage reveal about how characters are “constructed” in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*? Why do you think that Kundera chose to associate his characters so closely with philosophical issues and concerns?

5. Of the book's four main characters, only one—the Swiss Franz—is not Czech like Tomas, Tereza, and Sabina. Why do you think that Kundera introduced this non-Czech character into his narrative? How does his “foreign” perspective help us understand the plights and challenges faced by Tomas, Tereza, and Sabina?
6. Much of the narrative in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* centers on the political disruptions and catastrophes caused by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, after the brief period of political rebirth and openness known as the Prague Spring. How does Kundera interpret these dramatic political developments? How do they relate to the fictional themes of his novel?
7. Issues of sex and sexuality play a major role in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Why do you think that sex is so central to the intellectual universe of Kundera's novel? What does it illuminate beyond physical love and passion?
8. Part 3 of the novel is titled “Words Misunderstood.” How do Kundera's insights on the power of specific words to unite *and* divide us make us rethink our own relation to language? What makes interpreting these powerful individual words such a high-stakes act in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*?
9. The way that history is written and rewritten, especially by authoritarian regimes seeking political control, is a central theme of Kundera's writing not just in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* but also in his other works. What does his book teach us about the tools used to spread false narratives and misinformation? How can works of great literature combat their pernicious effects?
10. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was written in 1984. In your view, how has it aged? In what ways do you believe that it is relevant to our world today?

---

\* This document is for the exclusive use of the Virtual Book Club and may not be shared, cited, or otherwise disseminated.