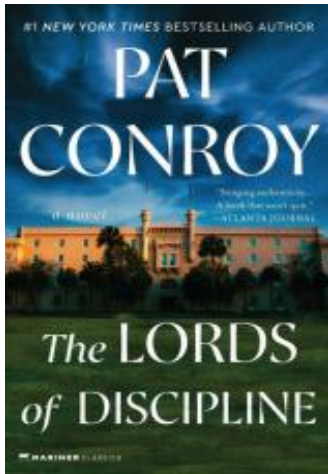


# The Lords of Discipline

by Pat Conroy

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## About the Book

THE LORDS OF DISCIPLINE is a novel about coming of age, brotherhood, betrayal and a man's forging of his own personal code of honor.

Will McLean, a senior on the cadets' honor court, is an outsider by nature: a basketball star at a school that prizes military prowess above athletics, a military man in training who dares to question the escalating Vietnam war. And yet his greatest struggle will be with the corrupt institution of which he is a part.

Rich in humor and suspense, abounding in a rare honesty and generosity of feeling, this novel established Pat Conroy as one of the strongest fictional voices in a generation.

## Discussion Guide

1. THE LORDS OF DISCIPLINE is a searing account of Will McLean's years at a prestigious military college in the 1960s. Reflecting back, he comments, "Yet the laws of recall are subject to distortion and alienation. Memory is a trick, and I have lied so often to myself about my own role and the role of others that I am not sure I can recognize the truth about those days. But I have come to believe in the unconscious integrity of lies. I want to record even them, every one of them." Why does Will question the authenticity of his own memories? Why is it so important to record this turbulent time?
2. A discussion about the Vietnam War between Will and his roommates gets quite heated, especially with Pig. Will thinks, "It both surprised and angered me that my roommates had reached a consensus of agreement against me." Why would this anger him so much? Does it make you think of another work of literature about young men?
3. Will has a fundamental issue with the Institute, its practices and true purpose. Besides honoring his father's wishes,

why do you think Will attended the Institute and then stayed the course?

**4.** Tradd thinks the Institute's mission is to break you down to build you up. Mark likes the camaraderie of the guys, and Pig appreciates the family aspect of it. With whom do you agree? Is the violence and humiliation necessary to achieve these goals?

**5.** After the death of Poteete, Will says, "I would look back on this night years later and decide that three of us would be chosen to be victims. And one of us would be prey." What did he mean by this ominous prediction?

**6.** What the freshmen have to endure during Hell Week is truly horrific. Have you or anyone you know experienced hazing? If Will wasn't fully invested in the college, as he claimed, why then would he put up with the abuse?

**7.** At several points, Pat Conroy describes the Hell Night abuse with language like "His lips touched against my ear in a malignant parody of a kiss" and "This was the rape of boys. Hell Night had the feel and texture of a psychic rape." Why do you think he chose such evocative language when detailing these events?

**8.** After the first assaults from upperclassmen, Will reflects, "I was not the same boy who had awakened to reveille that morning. That boy was a stranger to me now and he could never be recalled. The system had transformed me into an original astonished creature." Is this a good or a bad thing?

**9.** Why do the plebes change their attitudes toward Bobby Bentley? Why do you think he finally left the Institute?

**10.** "The plebe system gave cruelty a good name, disguised sadism in the severe raiment of duty." Why does the Institute think this is the best way to prepare their cadets? How long do you think you could endure such treatment?

**11.** After that brutal freshman year, Will vows, "I will not be like them. I will not be like them. I shall bear witness against them." What do you think he means here?

**12.** Why is Will attracted to Annie Kate Gervais? Why would he want to marry this woman he barely knows and who's pregnant with another man's child?

**13.** When it comes to learning, Will feels that "a great teacher is my adversary, my conqueror, commissioned to chastise me. He leaves me tame and grateful for the new language he has purloined from other kings whose granaries are filled and whose libraries are famous. He tells me that teaching is the art of theft: of knowing what to steal and from whom." Do you agree with Will's theory?

**14.** Were you surprised by the reaction of Will's roommates after Pig was caught stealing gas from Will's car? Why did they change their minds after they realized that the "Ten" might be behind it? Do you agree or disagree with the Honor Court's verdict against Pig? Did the punishment fit the crime?

**15.** Do you think the making of good cadets is worth all the collateral damage (i.e., Poteete, Bobby Bentley and Pig)? How would you feel if your brother or son were to attend the Institute? Do you still believe the hazing occurs?

**16.** After all the violence, harsh treatment and betrayal, Will looks back and thinks, "The Institute was the most valuable

experience I have ever had or will have. I believe it did bring me into manhood: The Institute taught me about the kind of man I did not want to be. Through rigorous harshness, I became soft and learned to trust that softness. Through the distorted vision of that long schizophrenia, I became clear-sighted. Under its system, a guerrilla was born inside me, and when the other boys rushed to embrace the canons of the Institute, I took to the hills.? Do you believe him? Do you think he?s conflicted about his feelings for the Institute?

## Author Bio

Pat Conroy (1945?2016) was the author of THE BOO, THE WATER IS WIDE, THE GREAT SANTINI, THE LORDS OF DISCIPLINE, THE PRINCE OF TIDES, BEACH MUSIC, THE PAT CONROY COOKBOOK: Recipes of My Life, MY LOSING SEASON, SOUTH OF BROAD, MY READING LIFE and THE DEATH OF SANTINI.

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**Publication Date:** December 20, 2022

**Genres:** Fiction

**E-book:** 496 pages

**Publisher:** Mariner Books Classics

**ISBN-10:** 0063323656

**ISBN-13:** 9780063323650