

First Thursday Book Club Discussion Questions**Title: Hillbilly Elegy**

December 2018, 2 pm. Mary LaHusen hosts.
Nancy Stepsis leads the discussion.

1. How does the author who was born in the 1980s justify his claim to poverty and underprivileged status when his grandparents bought a 4 bedroom house and he says his mother and stepfather's combined income was over \$100 K?
2. What are the positive values of the culture Vance describes in *Hillbilly Elegy*?
3. The author's mother is arguably the book's most powerful figure. Describe her and her struggle with addiction. How did the violence between her own parents, Mawaw and Papaw, affect her own adulthood?
4. To what—or to whom—does Vance attribute this escape from the cycle of addiction and poverty?
5. Consider Vance's own resentment toward his neighbors who were on welfare but owned cell phones. Does his book address the associated issues satisfactorily?
6. What were the guiding forces in J.D. Vance's life that allowed him to succeed, including the role of the military in shaping his perspective and work ethic?
7. Discuss Vance's feeling of dislocation upon graduating from Yale. How does he come to terms with them or does he?
8. Towards the end of the book, Vance asks himself, "How much is Mom's life her own fault? Where does blame stop and sympathy begin?" What are your thoughts?
9. Why is social capital important? How does this change for the author through his life?
10. How would you describe J.D. Vance's political views? If he were a politician, what policy changes would he support?
11. This book is being touted as explaining the rise of President Trump's popularity in this country. Does it explain his popularity and election? Why would Donald Trump as a presidential candidate appeal to this group of people - what do you think they hope from him? President Trump has never said exactly how he will deliver on his

promise to make America great again. Why do Appalachian people believe promises, especially from wealthy businessmen?

12. What does this book say about the American Dream? Where and for whom is this dream alive? Where has it died?