DISCUSSION GUIDE
*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* by Michael Chabon

1. In the novel, the reader is drawn into the world of Houdini, magic, theatrical performances, and escape tricks, which all influence Joe’s creation of the character, the Escapist. Is there a relationship between magic and the world of comic books in general?

2. In what ways does the concept of escapism figure into the lives of the characters?

3. What characters in the novel might reflect comic book archetypes (i.e. the rebel, the hero, the loner, the villain, the antihero, the seductress, the reborn, the boy scout, the innocent, the outcast, the victim, the comic relief)? Is there a point in the novel where roles shift?

4. What does family mean to each of the main protagonists?

5. The city of New York is presented with great detail and texture in the book, almost as if it were another character. Could this story have taken place in another setting? How does the city contribute to the journey presented in the narrative?

6. Joe Kavalier enters into the art world of Greenwich Village where he encounters Joseph Cornell, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí. Do you see a connection between Surrealism and the art of comics?

7. On page 167, Chabon refers to “this great, mad new American art form.” What makes comics uniquely American? Why might this art form have appealed to Roy Lichtenstein?

8. How might the works of Lichtenstein reflect the status of comics in the 1960s? Do comics play a role in his later work?

9. How are the status and societal value of comic books in the 1930s represented in the novel? Does this change as the plot moves forward? How are comic books seen today?

10. World War II and the rise of Hitler haunt the novel. How might similar social and political issues be reflected in the works of Lichtenstein?

11. Jewish culture is present throughout the book, particularly within the sphere of comic writing. Do you think this is only coincidental, or is there a greater connection that has shaped the development of comics?

12. In comic books, stories are often told in a visual rather than linear way. Does the novel use this same device?

13. On pages 176 and 253, the author lists some of the visual devices Joe Kavalier employed in his comic strips. Do you see any visual connections with the devices used by Roy Lichtenstein?

14. If video killed the radio star, what is the relationship between film and the comic book in the novel? How about the comic book artists and film stars? In what ways does fame play a role in Lichtenstein’s work?