



### Discussion Questions: *If We Were Villains*

#### “Words, Words, Words” Book Club—April 2022

1. What are your first impressions of the novel? Are there any passages that stuck out to you? If asked, what would you say this novel is about?
2. When discussing the Dellecher students, Oliver references how different disciplines use language: “...the language students (who spoke almost exclusively in Greek and Latin to one another and sometimes to other people) . . . and the philosophy students . . . prone to treating every conversation like a social experiment and tossing off words like ‘hylozoism’ and ‘compossibility’ as if they were as easily comprehensible as ‘good morning’”. What do you think of these observations when compared to how the theater students use Shakespeare to communicate?
3. As part of their class, the students debate who is the true tragic hero of *Julius Caesar*. Does this novel have a tragic hero? If so, who?
4. “How swiftly, how suddenly everything had gone wrong. Where did it even begin? Not with Meredith and me, I told myself, but months earlier—with *Caesar? Macbeth?*” Oliver concludes “It was impossible to identify Point Zero.” Is that true? Would you say there was a turning point amongst the students?
5. What do you think of the theatrical structure of the book? Are there elements to the story and its construction that further reflect the influence of Shakespeare’s plays?
6. How do the choice of highlighted plays—*Macbeth, Julius Caesar, King Lear, Romeo and Juliet*—inform the story?
7. Colborne asks Oliver if he “blames Shakespeare for any of it,” to which Oliver responds “I blame him for all of it.” What do you think of Oliver’s explanation? Is there another author or playwright that would have inspired the same results had they been studied so intensely?
8. We see very little of the other students at Dellecher and even less of the other disciplines. What kind of story might be told if the focus had been dance, or visual arts, or one of the other subjects? Are there any that you were particularly curious about?
9. What do you think would have happened if Richard had been saved? Would his behavior have changed, or would tragedy have come in another form?
10. What do you believe happened to James?