



Early Decision

By Lacy Crawford
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Questions for Discussion

1. Anne often finds herself caught between a student's desires and what the student's parents want for their child. Do you think Anne ever oversteps her role, or, conversely, does she fail to advocate enough for any student?
2. Where do you locate the source of Anne's passivity, her own inability to make clear choices in her life? Is she lacking in ambition?
3. Alexis Grant is a fantastically successful student whose parents have done very little to push her. This is in direct contrast to the "Tiger Mother" syndrome of parents riding their children to succeed at all costs. What does the book say about a student's sources of motivation, and how parents can encourage success?

4. Anne is deeply ambivalent about the work she does. Is it fundamentally unfair for parents to hire a private applications counselor, given that not all students can afford such help?

5. What does it say about the college process that such counselors might make a big difference in helping students to gain admission?

6. If Anne fills a need for each of her students, can we understand that to be a gap in their education or their upbringing? In other words, what was lacking: the right teacher, or the right counselor?

7. Anne feels bedeviled by odd experiences living in her apartment building in the city—her nasty neighbor April, her missing newspaper. To what extent does helicopter parenting and a focus on trophy colleges and education limit a person's exposure to the ins and outs of normal adult life? Where are those skills learned, if not in college?

8. Hunter Pfaff's parents treat his interest in horses and the American West as a passing adolescent fancy, in part because they don't understand how controlled he feels in their home. But are they wrong to steer him toward a more lucrative, and perhaps steady, career?

9. Does Sadie make the right decision to attend Duke in spite of the fact that she could not have earned admission without her father's connections? Is it wrong for a child to take advantage of lucky breaks?

10. Are any of Anne's students' lives changed by virtue of having worked with her? What does the book seem to say about the role of college in shaping a young person's destiny?