



Falling into Place

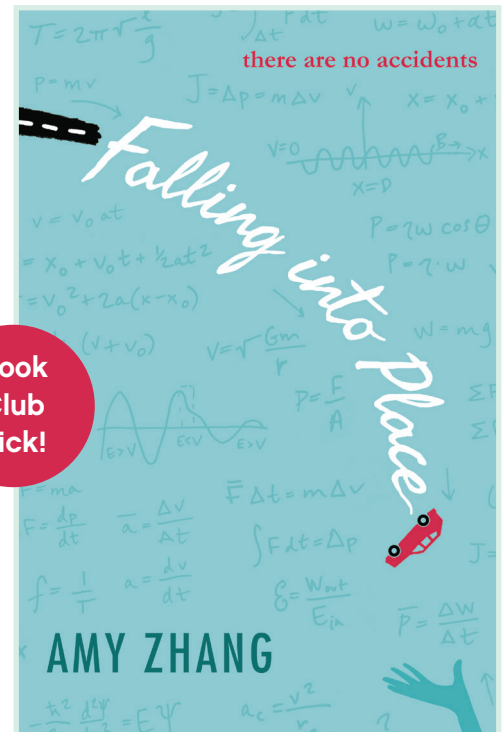
AMY ZHANG

ABOUT THE BOOK

“On the day Liz Emerson tries to die, they had reviewed Newton’s laws of motion in physics class. Then, after school, she put them into practice by running her Mercedes off the road.” Why did Liz Emerson decide that the world would be better off without her? Why did she give up? This nonlinear novel pieces together the short and devastating life of Meridian High’s most popular junior girl. Mass, acceleration, momentum, force—Liz didn’t understand it in physics, and even as her Mercedes hurtles toward the tree, she doesn’t understand it now. How do we impact one another? How do our actions reverberate? What does it mean to be a friend? To love someone? To be a daughter? Or a mother? Is life truly more than cause and effect?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Liz Emerson is a girl who seems to have everything. Describe her home life and her childhood. Why does she bully other kids and flirt with danger? Despite Liz’s cruelty to others, her attempted suicide evokes sympathy in readers. Discuss how the author endears Liz to readers.
2. Discuss Liz’s relationship with Julia and Kennie. What character traits does each girl have that make them compatible? Discuss how their relationships evolve over the course of the story. Which girl is more likeable? Least likeable? Why? Are their reasons for behaving as they do the same?
3. Why does Liz give herself seven days to live? How do the highlights of the week impact Liz’s decision?
4. Characterize Liz’s boyfriend and discuss his behavior related to her accident. Do they love each other? Explain. Why does Liz stay with him? Why does he stay with her? What does the story say about the nature of love?
5. How does Liz’s attempted suicide affect the students and teachers in her school? The author writes, “She would have known that most of them aren’t crying for her. They’re crying for themselves, for fear of death, for the loss of faith in their own invincibility, because if Liz Emerson is mortal, they all are” (p. 63). Do you agree or disagree? Why?
6. What does the story say about guilt and about forgiving oneself? Which character exemplifies the power of forgiveness and why?
7. Compare and contrast Liam and Jake. Which is a more likeable character and why? In what way is Liam heroic? Identify a character who seems cowardly and describe what makes him/her so.
8. From what point of view is the story told? At what point in the story does the author reveal the identity of the narrator? How does knowing the identity of the narrator impact your reading experience?
9. How are Newton’s laws of motion important to the story? How do they influence Liz’s thinking and that of her classmates? Consider and discuss the idea that our actions reverberate.
10. The author makes extensive use of flashback. Examine the sequence of events as the author portrays them. How does flashback aid the reader in understanding Liz’s motives? In understanding the impact that her behaviors have had on those around her? In understanding her pain, emptiness, and loss?



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