

Us

Harper Perennial

By David Nicholls

ISBN: 9780062365590

Introduction

Douglas Petersen may be mild mannered, but behind his reserve lies a sense of humor that, against all odds, seduces beautiful Connie into a second date . . . and eventually into marriage. Now, almost three decades after their relationship first blossomed in London, they live more or less happily in the suburbs with their moody seventeen-year-old son, Albie.

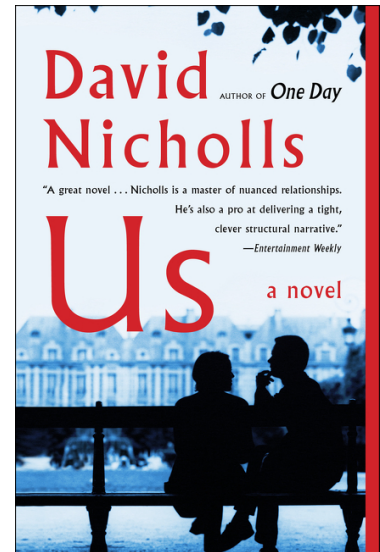
Then Connie tells Douglas that she thinks she wants a divorce.

The timing couldn't be worse. Hoping to encourage her son's artistic interests, Connie has planned a monthlong tour of European capitals, a chance to experience the world's greatest works of art as a family, and she can't bring herself to cancel. Douglas is privately convinced that this landmark trip will rekindle the romance in the marriage, and may even help him to bond with Albie.

From the streets of Amsterdam to the famed museums of Paris, from the cafés of Venice to the beaches of Barcelona, Douglas's odyssey brings Europe to vivid life just as he experiences a powerful awakening of his own. Will this summer be his last as a husband, or the moment when he turns his marriage, and maybe even his whole life, around?

Questions for Discussion

1. What inspired your group to select *US* by David Nicholls? Did you have any expectations?
2. Describe Douglas, Connie and Albie and their family dynamic. What do you think draws Douglas and Connie together? What drives them apart? How has their marriage evolved over the years and how does it affect their family life and their son?
3. This novel is about marriage --- and not just a boy-meets-girl love story account. What does the author tell us about the Happily Ever After part? How does "real life," as David Nicholls portrays here, compare with our romanticized notions? Do husbands and wives have a responsibility to keeping the spark alive after the honeymoon stage?



4. How important it is for a person to stay true to their individuality and how do we reconcile individual needs with those of our partners and loved ones?
5. Traveling is a major component of this novel. How does being physically away from home affect the characters? What opportunities does traveling offer them? What emotional challenges does it raise?
6. Throughout the “Grand Tour” of Europe, Douglas slowly realizes that his plans aren’t working out. How does he cope with this knowledge? How does he have to change over the course of his journey?
7. The novel is also about family. The parent-child relationship can be as frustrating as it is rewarding. What are the particular sources of turmoil in the relationship between Douglas and Albie? What do you think helps them resolve their differences?
8. In a culture accustomed to instant gratification, have we lost our ability to cope with and work through tough times? Do you think people give up on relationships too easily? What about Douglas and Connie? What about Albie?
9. The meaning of love can change over the course of relationship. Describe the love that Douglas has for his wife, Connie and his son, Albie. Compare and contrast each of the characters from the novel's beginning and its end. In what ways have they changed? How have they stayed the same? What have they learned about themselves, their lives, and each other?
10. Each part of the book begins with a quote. What do the quotes add to the story and the section it precedes? Which quote struck you the most? Why?
11. Between the “Grand Tour,” Connie’s painting and Albie’s photography, art is at the very center of US. How does seeing art affect the Douglas, Connie and Albie? What do you think art can tell us about our lives?
12. The novel is called US. Is there really an "Us" in the story? If yes, who is it? If no, what do you think inspired the title?