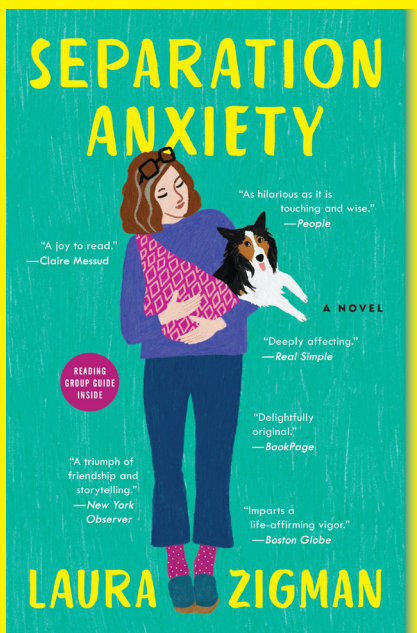


SEPARATION ANXIETY

A NOVEL BY LAURA ZIGMAN

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. At the beginning of the novel, Judy starts wearing the family dog in her now-teenage son's old baby sling. What does wearing the dog represent to Judy? Did your perceptions of why she needs to do this change throughout the book? Did you get more used to it? Less? Did you think that in the end Judy's emotional recovery would be measured by whether or not she stops wearing the dog?
2. Loss and grief have derailed Judy's life in ways that derail most of our lives at some point, and yet there is often a reluctance to truly share these sad, still times in our lives with others. Could you relate to the ways Judy tries to cope—wearing the dog, spending money on a creativity retreat she knows she can't afford, having the People Puppets move in to defray the costs of Teddy's Montessori school tuition? How do those decisions, while seemingly disastrous at certain points, all work in the end to reconnect Judy to herself, her career, and those she loves most?
3. The People Puppets who come to stay with Judy and Gary seem at first to be absurdly comic characters. What purpose do they eventually serve in the emotional growth of Judy, Gary, and Teddy—individually and as a family unit?
4. Except for Glenn, most friendships have fallen away for Judy and Gary. Why? Is it only because Gary's extreme anxiety has made it harder for them to socialize as a couple? Or does isolating herself from others serve a purpose for Judy? What does Glenn—who is a friend to both Judy and Gary—teach them over the years about having compassion for and empathy toward themselves and each other? What does she teach them about life and loss in her final days?
5. Let's talk about Gary's song about Judy and the dog. Does Judy love the dog more than she loves Gary?
6. Judy and Gary are committed to staying together for as long as they can for the sake of Teddy. Like most children, Teddy seems to know—and not know—what's truly going on in their marriage. How does their sheltering-in-place affect him?
7. A desire to always leave early—dinner parties, couples' therapy appointments, and all social engagements—is one of



SEPARATION ANXIETY

A NOVEL BY LAURA ZIGMAN

READING GROUP GUIDE

the few things that have always bonded Judy and Gary. And yet, when it comes to leaving their marriage early—getting divorced—neither seems willing to take that step. Despite the fact that they're technically separated but still living together, do you suspect there is more keeping them together than either of them realizes?

8. Judy's best-selling children's book and successful PBS animated series were called *There's a Bird on Your Head*. Judy refers to it in shorthand as a "weirdness manifesto," which was inspired by the way her mother always looked at her like she was strange. How does Judy's sense of herself as being weird and strange affect how she sees the state of her marriage and her self-awareness (or lack thereof) when it comes to wearing the dog in public?
9. Having career "success" or "failure" and feeling diminished by their similar falls from grace are notions both Judy and Gary obsess over: Judy as a once-successful children's book writer; Gary as a once-promising musician. How does Judy's writer's block and current career writing for *Well/er* affect her sense of herself? How does Gary's job as a snackologist affect his sense of himself?
10. While Judy mocks Sari Epstein's social media creativity-guru status, there is a moment during the weekend workshop in Vermont when she realizes that maybe the best thing Sari and her husband have created is a world of connection and community for themselves and others. How does Judy's sense of herself as a "nonjoiner" change? Does she regret not being a joiner most of her life? Does her idea of what it means to be a joiner shift from negative to positive? Do you think she will become more of a joiner in the future?
11. The term *separation anxiety* is usually used to describe what dogs feel when their owners leave the house and they are left alone; it can also refer to the anxieties young children face when being separated from their parents. How does the term, and the title of the book, relate to Judy with regards to her relationships with Teddy, Gary, Glenn, her parents—and with herself? How do you think her sense of self—and fear of being left alone—changed over the course of the novel? How do you think this will impact her relationships in the future?

