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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

If I Stay

by

Gayle Forman

(New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2009)

Author:

Gayle Forman is an award-winning author and journalist whose articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Elle*. She lives in Brooklyn with her family. [From the author's website]

Summary:

Seventeen-year-old Mia has no memory of the accident; she can only recall riding along the snow-wet Oregon road with her family. Then, in a blink, she finds herself watching as her own damaged body is taken from the wreck . . . Though in a coma, Mia finds herself watching those who come to visit her in the hospital, and through a combination of real-time narration and flashbacks, readers will come to know Mia and the people who make up the tapestry of her life: her parents, her grandparents, her family friends Henry and Willow, and her closest friends Kim and Adam. More than a love story, more than a story about living or dying, *If I Stay* is a story about how we transform our lives. When do we make choices? When do we make sacrifices? Are they one and the same? [From the author's website]

Questions:

1. The story opens with school being closed because of inclement weather and Mia's family deciding to take a trip to visit friends and relatives. Describe the mood of the morning. What role does this scene play when tragedy hits?
2. After the initial tragedy, the reader learns more about Mia's parents. What does Mia have in common with her father? Her mother?
3. Mia's grandparents each play an influential role in her life. What do each of them give her? How are these relationships similar? Different? How have they influenced Mia's father?
4. Mia has two important peer relationships in the story—with her best friend, Kim, and her boyfriend, Adam. Kim and Adam are distant with one another. Is Mia's reaction to their coolness toward one another natural?
5. Mia and Adam have different musical interests. Mia loves classical music and plays the cello. Adam plays guitar in a popular rock band. What draws them together?

6. Mia struggles to fit in with Adam's group. For Halloween Mia goes all out and surprises him by dressing as a rocker chick. What is Adam's reaction? Explain.
7. Discuss the meanings of "sacrifice" and of "choice." How are they different? How are they similar?
8. The themes of sacrifice and choice occur throughout the story and play out in several relationships. Is Mia's father giving up his own music because of his children a sacrifice or a choice?
9. How is Mia's father a symbol for one person transforming his/her life for another? How does Gramps view his decision? Do Henry and Willow understand why Mia's father wants to change? What decisions must Adam and Mia consider? Are these choices or sacrifices?
10. Mia is pulled between wanting to die and wanting to live, so much so that she wishes for a "death proxy." What effect does Gramps's visit have on Mia?
11. Kim says to Mia, "You still have a family." What did this mean to you? What is a family?
12. Adam goes to desperate measures to see Mia for the first time and then stays only a few minutes before racing out. He returns later with some classical music and a headset he puts on Mia. What does this act suggest about his relationship with Mia? Using examples from the story, make a case for Adam's unconditional love for Mia. Is it possible to make the opposite case?
13. How would your response to the story be different if Mia had died?
14. Music plays an important role in the story. Cite examples and explain.
15. What meaning can you attribute to the song written by Mia's father? How does it represent themes in the story? How does it represent Mia's life? That of her father? Her mother? The lives of their family friends Henry and Willow?
16. Do you consider Mia and Adam a mature couple? Why or why not? Do you think Mia and Adam will continue their relationship? What does their future hold?
17. Discuss the use of point of view in the story. To continue the first person, present tense, point of view introduced in the opening scene, the writer has Mia narrate the story in an unusual way. Why might the author have chosen this technique instead of writing the entire story from third person point of view?
18. Forman makes extended use of flashback to tell the story. Explain how the flashback scenes help us understand Mia's thoughts about living or dying.

19. *If I Stay* is a superb example of internal conflict. Cite passages from the story that speak the strongest to Mia's struggle.
20. Could the story have been titled *If I Leave*? Why or why not?