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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Things I Want My Daughters to Know

by

Elizabeth Noble

(New York: Harper, 2009)

Author:

Elizabeth Noble is the author of the beloved internationally bestselling novels *The Reading Group*, *The Friendship Test*, and *Alphabet Weekends*. She lives with her husband and their two daughters in New York City. [From the book jacket]

Summary:

When Barbara realizes time is running out, she writes to her four daughters, aware that they will be facing the trials and triumphs of life without her at their side.

Lisa is in her thirties but is incapable of making a commitment. Jennifer is buttoned up so tight she could burst. Twentysomething Amanda, the traveler, has always distanced herself from the family. And then there's Hannah, a teenage girl on the verge of womanhood.

By drawing on the wisdom in Barbara's letters, the girls might just find a way to cope with their loss. In coming to terms with their bereavement, can they also set themselves free to enjoy their lives and find all the passion and love that they deserve?

This heartfelt novel by bestselling author Elizabeth Noble celebrates family, friends...and the glorious, endless possibilities of life. [From the book jacket]

Questions:

1. Based on Mark's reaction to Barbara's death, how would you characterize the quality of their marriage?
2. What does Barbara's composition of letters, to be read posthumously by her children and her husband, suggest about her personality and her view on her mortality?
3. How would you describe each of the sisters – Lisa, Jennifer, Amanda, and Hannah – in terms of the role that each plays in the family as a whole?
4. Why does the prospect of starting a family imperil Jennifer's marriage to Stephen?

5. To what extent is Lisa's inability to commit to Andy grounded in her own feelings of inadequacy?
6. What does Amanda's decision to delay reading Barbara's letter suggest about her ambivalence about her mother's death?
7. How does Barbara's decision to reveal a closely-guarded secret in her letter to Amanda affect the rest of the family, and to what extent does her confession seem unnecessary?
8. How does Hannah's relationship with Mark change in the aftermath of Barbara's death?
9. What does Mark's fling with Jane represent to him, and why does he feel so guilty about it?
10. Of the four sisters, whose particular circumstances did you most identify with, and why?

Further Reading:

The Sister. Poppy Adams. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

His Illegal Self. Peter Carey. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

The Rain Before it Falls. Jonathan Coe. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008.

The Cloud of Unknowing. Thomas H. Cook. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 2007.

Ask Again Later. Jill A. Davis. New York: Ecco, 2007.