

A Family Across Town by Aynah Askanas

Book Club Discussion Questions

Estelle

1. Do you understand and/or empathize with Estelle's decision to stay with Matthew? What about her decision to continue having children?
2. Did you find Estelle to be a strong or weak woman?

Matthew

3. Why do you think Matthew stayed with both women and continued having children after getting them both pregnant? Why didn't he choose one early on?
4. How did Matthew practice deceit and compartmentalization? Was he more "good" or "evil"?

The Siblings

5. How did each Cohen child react differently to the secret with which they lived?
6. Which child, if any, was most adversely affected by the secret and why?
7. Why do you think the Cohen children, given their traumatic upbringing, grew up to be so successful?
8. Why do you think Aynah tried to be perfect?

Aynah and her Parents

9. What do you think of the final scene between Aynah and her Mom? Is there any symbolism or metaphor in the imitation of the astronauts?
10. How was Aynah like and unlike her mother? Her father?

Family Secrets

11. Can parents hide their problems from their children?
12. Are family secrets as detrimental as, worse than, or less damaging than other types of family dysfunction, e.g., alcoholism, physical abuse, verbal abuse, etc.?
13. Why is the phrase, "The Secret," capitalized until the siblings discover the secret, and then it is used with a small t and s?
14. Were there any secrets in your family? If so, what were their adverse effects, if any?

Miscellaneous

15. How does the memoir exemplify generational trauma and generational patterns? What problems or issues seem to have been passed down? (From Estelle's side of the family? From Matthew's side?)
16. What do the dynamics between all three adults say about a. choice, b. fear, c. denial?
17. What do Estelle and Lorna's actions (or inactions) say about their desire to "win"? Is that desire understandable, given the circumstances?