

Amy Inspired Discussion Questions

Amy and Zoë share the same dream, the same faith, and the same bathroom-- and yet they regularly irritate each other. How does their relationship evolve from that of the irksome familiarity between housemates to the intimacy of deep friendship? How can crisis serve as a catalyst for growth in otherwise casual relationships? Did their friendship remind you of any in your own life?

Amy is frequently forced to revise her first impressions of people; this is most evident in her relationship with Eli, who perpetually challenges her assumptions about the Christian life. Did the strong feelings between Amy and Eli in spite of their differences come as a surprise to you? How did you feel about their differences, particularly in regards to the practice of religion?

Eli is not the only one whose physical appearance is atypical from Amy's perception of normal: Zoë is also seen sporting a number of purposefully colorful wardrobes, from striped stockings to wigs of real human hair. What is the relationship between dress and identity for both Zoë and Eli? For Amy herself? Do you think all dress is inherently performative, even when unassuming?

Eli, Amy, and Zoë inhabit an adult world conspicuously devoid of children, and yet the longing for children and for childhood itself imbues the story with a poignant sense of absence. Amy sees adulthood as a cumbersome accumulation of experiences, both good and bad but above all arbitrary. She claims that her childhood self has been collaged over with "badges applied thin and too early lacquered in place." Do you relate to her angst or were you grateful to leave childhood behind? In what ways do the needs of our "inner child" compel our behaviors as adults?

Toward the end of the novel, Amy suspects her unrelenting ambition masks secret pain. In what ways does the fear of rejection become its own terrible motivation for Amy? How do you see it playing out as a primary source of motivation in our society? What is it about rejection that is so crippling spiritually and emotionally?

Amy's family played a considerable role in making her who she is, and yet Amy sees herself as vastly different from both her mother and her father. Do you think she could ever erase the influence of her background or if she should at all? How important is family in determining who people become and how they live their lives?

Many of the characters experience loss: the loss of youthful idealism, of significant others, even of loved ones. Despite the many crises the characters face, their sense of humor prevails. What role does humor play in the novel? In

the experience of grief in your own life?

In his sermon on Ecclesiastes, Pastor Maddock asserts that to disregard the possibility of some kind of heaven is to in effect concede the futility of every mortal life. The belief in life beyond death, however, not only comforts the grieving but also affirms the individual. Did you agree with his interpretation of that Scripture? Does the concept of eternity in any way influence your daily life?

Excerpts of Amy's own writing are included at various points in the story. Notably, these passages appear when she is grappling with an emotional conflict of her own. In what ways does she sublimate her problems in her writing? Do you think she is guilty of "borrowing from life" in the same way that she so ardently criticizes Zoë for? Have you ever done something similar for catharsis, whether intentionally or not?

The novel concludes with the ending of Amy's most recent short story. This is the only story we see her complete. How does the ending she chose--and the fact that she found one at all--influence your interpretation of the book overall?