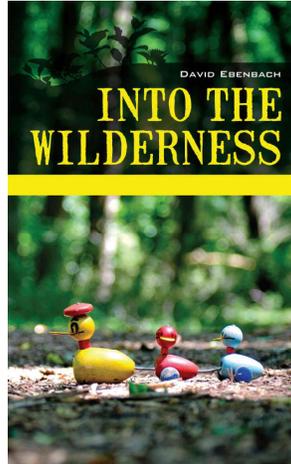


Into the Wilderness

Book Group Discussion Questions



The title of the collection, *Into the Wilderness*, comes from one of the Judith stories. How is her experience like a journey into the wilderness? Does this idea apply to the other stories as well?

The collection as a whole showcases a wide range of parenting situations—nuclear families, single mothers, fathers on their own, same-sex parents, people who don't have children at all. How does this variety shape the experience of the collection as a whole?

Is there a certain “type” of character that appears several times in the collection? Why do you think that is?

Many of the characters in this collection are Jewish. Does this seem to be just a background fact about the characters, or are there any significant connections between the characters' Judaism and their parenting? How does religion come into play?

One issue that comes up several times in this collection is the possibility of differences between fathers and mothers. The narrator of the Judith stories wonders if her baby would be better off with a father in her life, as do the main characters of “Peanuts.” Meanwhile, the narrator of “Hungry to Eat” wishes his wife was around to help their son. Do the stories ultimately suggest that fathers and mothers are substantially different kinds of parents, or do they cast doubt on that distinction?

A lot of the endings of the stories in the collection are very uncertain. The mother in “A Person of Interest” doesn’t know what happened to Adi, just as Katie in “Nobody Loves a Snowy Girl” doesn’t know why her daughter acts out. Were they still satisfying in their uncertainty?

A few of the stories feature parent-child relationships where the children are adults; how does this develop the theme of parenthood? Do the parents in these stories seem to be struggling with similar obstacles as the stories with younger children?

How do the Judith stories help to link and satisfy the themes and questions that arise in the other stories?

In the Judith stories, the main character takes a somewhat unconventional path to pregnancy and motherhood, and then expresses fairly frank doubts about motherhood. Were you uncomfortable with Judith, or did you find her sympathetic—or both?

“Jewish Day” ends on an image of Jeremy, reading and walking in the midst of a crowd, yet without “bumping into anything.” Why end on that image?

The narrator of “Person of Interest” makes a decision that has significant consequences for the young man named Adi in her building. Does she make the right decision?

“Is Any Thing Too Hard for the Lord?” and “Naming” both feature couples who don’t have children, albeit for different reasons. What other similarities and differences do you notice between the stories?

In “Counterfactual,” which one of the versions of the story do you think actually happened to the characters, if any? Or is more than one version true in the story? What was the effect of this story and its hypothetical nature in the company of the other, more concrete stories?

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