

Play for Me

Discussion Group Guide

1. *Play for Me* begins with Lily dropping off her only son for his first year of college. How much, if at all, do you think this departure has to do with the events to follow? Her husband is steady and calm about it, as he is with many things. Do you think it is harder for women to have an empty nest? Why?
2. When attending the concert at her son's school during a weekend trip, Lily has the realization that she is much older than everyone else: "The auditorium was packed, loud, buzzing, working up a head of steam. Lily was suddenly aware of how much older she was than most of the audience. Not that anyone noticed or cared; she was clearly invisible." Is aging different for men and women? If yes, in what ways?
3. During the concert, Lily is shaken to the core by JJ's playing. In her words, the "notes of the guitar had pierced, as if they had done permanent damage, shifted her very DNA." Discuss how Lily thinks of this moment as "damaging" and inevitable, beyond her control.
4. How is Lily altered by the sound of Blaise and JJ's music in that moment? Is it JJ or the music that throws Lily off balance? Are the two inseparable?
5. After the concert, Lily's daily routine becomes almost unbearable: "She, somewhere along a line she could no longer remember, had become a creature of order, even stasis." Does this realization drive her to escape and sneak away to watch Blaise and JJ perform? What do you think may be missing from Lily's life?
6. Lily thinks to herself, of the asthma caused by her pregnancy, that "she had lost her voice and gained a son; it was a trade she never regretted." Do you think Lily's view changes over the course of the novel? Is the loss of a son or loss of her "voice" more at the heart of what Lily is searching for?
7. Lily finds a way to be on tour with the band by offering to do a video for free. What is the significance of Lily shifting from audience member to watching the concerts behind the lens of her camera?
8. Discuss JJ and Blaise's relationship. How do they help and/or hinder each other? How does the dynamic shift when Lily joins them on tour? What do JJ and Blaise each need from Lily?

9. Lily becomes increasingly destabilized by her preoccupation with music. She finds herself thinking “Maybe reactionaries were right, and music was subversive.” Discuss the power of music.
10. Is it possible to have a second chance or to reinvent yourself once your life is settled? In which ways might this need—desire—be awakened? Is Lily compelled to follow JJ and the music? Does she consciously choose this spontaneous choice to follow the band; does she consciously choose betrayal?
11. Is Lily stronger upon her return home? Have her actions gotten her closer or further from her growth as a person?
12. Does Stephen react the way you expected him to upon Lily’s return? How do you feel about his reaction and how he chooses to move forward?
13. Were you angry or shocked by Lily’s behavior? If so, do you think you would have felt the same if a male character had behaved similarly?
14. What do you think of Blaise—is she vulnerable, disturbed, manipulative, egotistical?
15. What do you think JJ feels for Lily—true romantic love, or something else? When he says to her that he isn’t about being a “star” but just wants to play music, do you believe him?
16. What do you think is at the heart of fandom, and hero worship?
17. Lily struggles throughout the novel with her weight—does her weight loss represent something on a deep level, and if so, what?
18. Lily goes on tour throughout the northeast, but she takes an irrevocable step only when she crosses the border into Canada, into the cold wintertime of Montreal. How is the author using this setting to intensify the action in this part of the novel?
19. What do you think is the importance of art, music, literature, etc. in human lives? Do you see the arts more as an enhancement or more as a necessity?
20. Do you think everyone has the capacity or need for creative fulfillment, whether realized or not?