



The Jewish Community Library

Book Club in a Box Guide

Goyhood

By Reuven Fenton

The following questions are provided to enhance your experience of the book by suggesting a variety of ways to discuss the novel.

1. How would you describe David's and Marty's lives as preteens? Did the boys' freedom to roam their town and surrounding communities reflect Ida's neglect, her confidence in their maturity, or something else?
2. Why do you think the author centered the action below the Mason-Dixon Line? What preconceptions did you have about the South before reading *Goyhood*? Did the novel change your views or reinforce your expectations? How?
3. The narrative is suffused with misdirections, fabrications, and outright lies. Describe some of the critical falsehoods on which the story turns. Are the situations believable?
4. Should Ida have let her children know of her deception? Should Rabbi Kugel have shared Ida's letter with her sons? Does discovering the truth beneath family secrets present opportunities for repair and teshuvah, or exacerbate discord? Are there situations in which it is honorable to leave a fable buried?
5. Why do you think Mayer embraces a yeshiva-centered, religious lifestyle? Does it expand his world and deepen his relationships, or constrict his ability to make meaningful choices? Is the study of Jewish texts a mitzvah if it doesn't lead to empathy and moral action?
6. Judaism encompasses a broad spectrum of beliefs, practices, norms, expectations, and identities. Tolerance for differences vary. Who gets to decide who is a Jew, and whose version of Jewish life is valid? Do you think Mayer could ever accept a different path?
7. Hebrew texts appear throughout the book. Do you think they enhance the narrative or distract? Is there one in particular that resonated with you? Explain.
8. David's and Mayer's relationships with women are complicated. What do Ida, Sarah, Charlayne, and Rabbi Teitelbaum contribute to the boys'/men's sense of themselves? Are the women fully drawn characters? If not, what's missing?
9. What is your favorite scene in *Goyhood*? Why?
10. Was *Goyhood's* ending a surprise to you? If so, how would you prefer Mayer's, David's, Charlayne's, and Sarah's futures to play out?
11. What does the book's title convey? In what way does it capture the essence of the novel, or would you suggest a different title?

The Jewish Community Library is located at 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94115. For more information about the Library and its book club services, call 415.567.3327 x706 or go to www.jewishcommunitylibrary.org