


The Butterfly Lampshade
by Aimee Bender

BOOK CLUB KIT


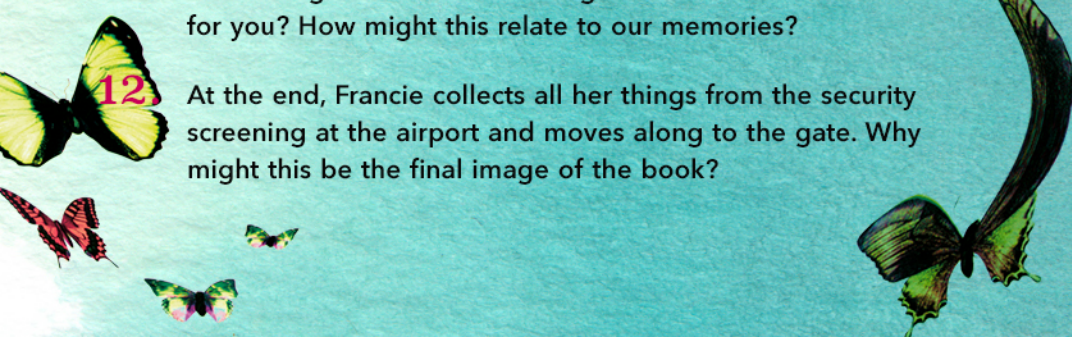
DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Why do you think Francie feels safer locked in her room? Did you ever feel baby Vicky was in real danger? When is a time you felt as if your thoughts were frightening?
 2. Why does Francie want the poison bottle as a centerpiece? Why does that motivate her enough to stand up to her dominant grandmother?
 3. What does she mean when she says she wanted to slow it down in the tent? Why does the book take things so slowly—why might this be useful for Francie?
 4. Is Elaine afraid of her daughter?
 5. With the pickup line of cars, Francie is terrified of things disconnecting, of all the children of the world going away and never returning. How does this distortion of reality affect her as a character in general?
 6. In parts of the book, different characters have varying relationships with the way their minds work—Elaine blurs reality and fantasy and thinks there's a spider in her hand; Francie is worried about her own darker thoughts, and Minn is worried that her child and niece will "catch" what her sister has. In your own family, what are some of the different ways you see your relatives (and yourself) processing the world?
 7. A large section of the book is spent on the train ride with Francie, traversing the landscape her uncle has marked in the dirt. What is this experience like for Francie? Why is marking this transition so important to her?
- 

(continued...)

DISCUSSION GUIDE

- 
8. What does she mean when she says the beetle felt “resigned” to her? What’s the feeling in that scene on the train to you, the reader?
9. There’s a man on the train, and the woman on the train, and their presence is never fully explained or clarified. What feeling did they leave you with? Putting aside intellectual understanding for a moment, how did you experience them on the page? What world did they seem to come from or inhabit? Many writers believe there’s no right answer for this kind of thing, and it’s more about what came through to you, what affected you.
10. Objects play a big role in this book, and are other things to track and follow. Why is Francie more drawn to selling objects than to framing them? What’s the difference in these activities? What objects in your life are meaningful to you but may have disappeared into their shelves?
11. Walker Percy says when we face a closet and declare we have nothing to wear, it’s because we have become so used to the same things that we can no longer see them. Is this ever true for you? How might this relate to our memories?
12. At the end, Francie collects all her things from the security screening at the airport and moves along to the gate. Why might this be the final image of the book?
- 

A CONVERSATION WITH **Aimee Bender**



What was the inspiration for your most recent book?

There were many! I was interested in types of thinking, and types of blurriness—someone who experiences psychotic episodes has to contend with a very difficult, blurry line between reality and fantasy, and that's Francie's mom, Elaine, but there are other ways of fuzzing this line—many of us think our thoughts are worrisome or can do damage, when they are just thoughts—and I wanted to show a whole spectrum of types of thinking within one family and explore how love and worry and perception might all collide and combine.

What book are you currently reading or excited about reading?


I am at this moment reading Rufi Thorpe's incredible novel *The Knockout Queen*, which is funny, dark, voice-driven, precise, inviting—I'm enjoying it so much.

What was your favorite part about writing your most recent book?

There is a scene on the train where Francie has a moment with the beetle thing. Is this a spoiler? Slightly. But I felt something when I wrote it, and that let me know that some experience was brewing in the book, that there was a book happening, which is the moment I wait for when writing a novel—then, I can trust in a kind of emotional accumulation, and it was a turning point in what, for me, is always a very messy writing process.

What piece of writing advice do you wish you had received?

Don't try to be literary—effort to impress generally sinks like a stone on the page! Just write what you like to write.

A collection of colorful butterflies in shades of green, yellow, orange, and red, positioned in the upper right corner of the page.

Everything but the Kitchen Sink Brownies

Ingredients

- 1 box Pillsbury Brownie Mix (13 X 9 Family Size)
+ the ingredients called for on the box
- 1 cup potato chips
- ½ cup pretzel pieces
- ½ cup M&M's candies
- ½ cup mini Reese's Peanut Butter Cups
- ¼ cup Jet-Puffed Mini Marshmallows

Instructions


Prepare the brownie mix according to package instructions.

Scatter your add-ins across the top of the batter in the pan so they are evenly distributed.

Bake according to the package instructions for your pan type and size.

Let the brownies cool before slicing.

Recipe from sugardishme.com

A collection of colorful butterflies in shades of green, yellow, orange, and red, positioned in the lower left corner of the page.