

Reading Group Guide

Odd One Out

By Quinton Skinner



17 Conversation Starters

1. Of all the narrators in the book, who is your favorite and why? Why do you think the readers are only exposed to Sam, Kevin, and the mother as primary narrators? Did you change your opinion of any of them as you read?
2. What role does humor play in this book? In each of the three sections, the family members cope with loss in their own way—do you think this reliance on humor has a different outcome for each of them?
3. We see all three Burns children grow and experience their own struggles. Does Sam's relationship with her parents after the divorce affect her outlook on intimacy? Do you see similarities in how the siblings form relationships later in life?
4. Do you see a way in which traditional gender roles are subverted or challenged in this book?
5. How is the symbol of marriage carried throughout this novel? This book strays from conventional ideas of marriage and relationships, especially in the latter half. What is Skinner trying to convey about the ties that stay behind after the dissolution of a marriage?
6. Who is the odd one out? Do you think this is made clear by the end of the book?
7. Is forgiveness an important method of coping with loss? Do all the characters practice forgiveness? How do you think the choice to forgive or not forgive affect their familial relationships?
8. Did any one sibling seem more affected than the others by their mother's sudden departure?
9. Would you forgive the mother if you were in her children's or husband's position? Do you agree with her decision to leave her husband after what she witnessed?
10. Why do you think we never get to read about Daniel's perspective?
11. Do you think it is in most people's "human nature" (as Glenn says on page 30) to take a romantic partner for granted as he did? What do you see as the biggest contributing factor to their divorce?
12. What differences and similarities do you see in the relationships Eliza has with each of her children? In the case of her feelings towards Kevin, do you think there is significance in the fact that he is the first narrator?
13. We don't know the mother's name until late in the story, much less why she left. How did that affect your reading of the book and understanding of the other characters? Does anything change after reading her perspective and learning of her reasons?

14. On page 305, Eliza says, “Love takes work, and sacrifice, but maybe not as much as it should.” She goes on to say that if we knew how costly it could be, we wouldn’t treat our relationships so callously when they inevitably become inconvenient. Do you agree with this view of love?
15. How do you think Eliza came to live with her decision to leave her family? How would she be viewed in our society today and why? What would be different if Glenn had left instead?
16. Despite Glenn’s insistence that their family has always been inclusive, why do you think Daniel has a different experience in exploring his sexuality than Sam?
17. In Eliza’s musings in the last chapter, she contemplates how people view her public image as “the judge, the rock,” but may not realize that her private self sometimes contradicts the image of a judge. She later notes that after the divorce, few people knew that it was Eliza who had left Glenn. How does Skinner examine the relationship and the contradictions between the public self and the private self? Which characters battle with this most deeply?