

DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *BEFORE WE ARRIVED*

by Jodie Pine

Themes

- Loss of a sibling/child/parent
- Loss of a close friend or partner
- The meaning of 'family', biological and found
- Responses to personal trauma—immediate aftermath and over time
- Relationships between family/herd members
- How race, religion, and culture inform our views and how we navigate through the world
- Randomness vs. Fate vs. Choice
- Genetic vs. Environmental
- The universality of pain and suffering
- Second chances
- The function of dreams and visions
- The potential healing power of animals

Questions

1. When we first meet Henry he is sad and aimless. Do you think he would have eventually found his way to a happy life if he hadn't gone to the sanctuary?

2. Jayce works at a job that holds great meaning for him, but is haunted by the past and on some level deprives himself of living fully. Has fear, anxiety, or self-doubt ever inhibited you from welcoming potentially positive opportunities or connections?

3. Rivka decides to establish a personal relationship with Nina after her professional role of assisting the baby comes to an end. Given their differing ages and backgrounds, why do you think the two women are drawn to each other?

4. All three of the central characters are well-educated and have some insight about themselves. Does this factor in to how they manage their struggles?

5. How do each of the narrators relate to their respective nuclear family members? Do some of those relationships change over time? Explore the differences in the tone and milieu of the households they grew up in.

6. Each of the main characters was born into a minority family, as were many of the secondary characters. What are the theoretical and real links between individual and collective/generational traumas and strengths?

7. While there can certainly be overlaps, people respond to traumatic events in different ways. Have you had firsthand experience with tragedy? Did your perspective of yourself and/or your view of the world change because of it? Did this result in a shift in your life priorities or relationships?

8. Maya and David form an instant bond at a young age. What does their closeness mean to each other as they grow into adulthood? What are the salient components of a healthy relationship?

9. *Before We Arrived* was written in alternating-first-person using dialogue and internal monologue. Are there any differences between how the primary and secondary characters see themselves and how others view them?

10. Jayce is attached to Molly, Rivka and Max are buddies, and Henry is smitten with Liz, Luke, and the other farm rescues. Have animals played a role in your life? What can we learn about the dynamics between animals of the same or different species?