

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again! All you need are some friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are and a little bit of organization.

### HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

**The best way to find people to be in your book club is to ask your friends.** Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your club, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

### Figure out when and where you want to meet.

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

### Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.

Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

**The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a book club. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!**

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit [www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians](http://www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians)

Out of unspeakable loss comes a profound choice.



### If I Stay

by Gayle Forman

978-0-525-42103-0 (HC) • \$16.99

Ages 14 up • Grades 9 up

Available April 2009

**"Graceful, imaginative and haunting, *If I Stay* is both a page-turner and a gentle, satisfying read."**

—Patricia McCormick,  
author of National Book Award Finalist *Sold*

In a single moment, *everything* changes.

CHOICES. Seventeen-year-old Mia is faced with some tough ones: Stay true to her first love—music—even if it means losing her boyfriend and leaving her family and friends behind?

Then one February morning Mia goes for a drive with her family and in an instant, everything changes. Suddenly, all the choices are gone, except one. And it's the only one that matters.

*If I Stay* is a heartachingly beautiful book about the power of love, the true meaning of family, and the choices we all make.



Dutton Books

A division of Penguin Young Readers Group

[www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians](http://www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians)

This discussion guide has been provided by Penguin Young Readers Group for classroom, library, and reading group use. It may be reproduced in its entirety or excerpted for these purposes. DISCUSSION GUIDE ISBN: 978-0-525-43874-8

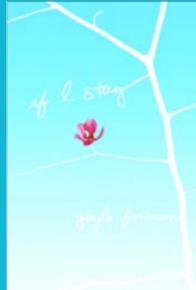
## DISCUSSION GUIDE

*if I stay*



gayle forman

## ABOUT THE BOOK



*“Just listen,” Adam says with a voice that sounds like shrapnel. I open my eyes wide now. I sit up as much as I can. And I listen.*

*“Stay,” he says.*

Seventeen-year-old Mia has no memory of the accident; she can only recall riding along the snow-wet Oregon road with her family. Then, in a blink, she finds herself watching as her own damaged body is taken from the wreck . . .

Though in a coma, Mia finds herself watching those who come to visit her in the hospital, and through a combination of real-time narration and flashbacks, readers will come to know Mia and the people who make up the tapestry of her life: her parents, her grandparents, her family friends Henry and Willow, and her closest friends Kim and Adam. More than a love story, more than a story about living or dying, *If I Stay* is a story about how we transform our lives. When do we make choices? When do we make sacrifices? Are they one and the same?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



GAYLE FORMAN is an award-winning author and journalist whose articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Seventeen*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Elle*. She lives in Brooklyn with her family. Visit her at [www.gayleforman.com](http://www.gayleforman.com).

**Q: This book explores some serious themes. Why is this a book for kids and not adults?**

**A:** It's a book for kids precisely because it explores serious themes. Teenagers are grappling with choices about life and love as much as adults, so why shouldn't their reading reflect that?

**Q: What inspired you to write this book?**

**A:** Music. Oregon. People I have loved. And unfortunately, the book is inspired by a real-life tragedy that happened several years ago.

**Q: This is a book about death, but it's not depressing. Why is that?**

**A:** Maybe because it's really about the power of love—of family, friends, and music—and therefore it ultimately affirms life.

## PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Compare and contrast a point in your life when you felt you controlled your future with a time when you felt powerless.
- Describe a situation when you gave up something in your life. Why did you do it? How did giving it up make you feel?
- How much control do we have over our own destiny?
- Is it possible to love someone, yet walk away from a relationship?
- What coping skills help us deal with personal tragedy?

## POST-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The story opens with school being closed because of inclement weather and Mia's family deciding to take a trip to visit friends and relatives. Describe the mood of the morning. What role does this scene play when tragedy hits?
- After the initial tragedy, the reader learns more about Mia's parents. What does Mia have in common with her father? Her mother?
- Mia's grandparents each play an influential role in her life. What do each of them give her? How are these relationships similar? Different? How have they influenced Mia's father?
- Mia has two important peer relationships in the story—with her best friend, Kim, and her boyfriend, Adam. Kim and Adam are distant with one another. Is Mia's reaction to their coolness toward one another natural?
- Mia and Adam have different musical interests. Mia loves classical music and plays the cello. Adam plays guitar in a popular rock band. What draws them together?
- Mia struggles to fit in with Adam's group. For Halloween Mia goes all out and surprises him by dressing as a rocker chick. What is Adam's reaction? Explain.
- Discuss the meanings of “sacrifice” and of “choice.” How are they different? How are they similar?
- The themes of sacrifice and choice occur throughout the story and play out in several relationships. Is Mia's father giving up his own music because of his children a sacrifice or a choice?

- How is Mia's father a symbol for one person transforming his/her life for another? How does Gramps view his decision? Do Henry and Willow understand why Mia's father wants to change? What decisions must Adam and Mia consider? Are these choices or sacrifices?
- Mia is pulled between wanting to die and wanting to live, so much so that she wishes for a “death proxy.” What effect does Gramps's visit have on Mia?
- Kim says to Mia, “You still have a family.” What did this mean to you? What is a family?
- Adam goes to desperate measures to see Mia for the first time and then stays only a few minutes before racing out. He returns later with some classical music and a headset he puts on Mia. What does this act suggest about his relationship with Mia? Using examples from the story, make a case for Adam's unconditional love for Mia. Is it possible to make the opposite case?
- How would your response to the story be different if Mia had died?
- Music plays an important role in the story. Cite examples and explain.
- What meaning can you attribute to the song written by Mia's father? How does it represent themes in the story? How does it represent Mia's life? That of her father? Her mother? The lives of their family friends Henry and Willow?
- Do you consider Mia and Adam a mature couple? Why or why not? Do you think Mia and Adam will continue their relationship? What does their future hold?
- Discuss the use of point of view in the story. To continue the first person, present tense, point of view introduced in the opening scene, the writer has Mia narrate the story in an unusual way. Why might the author have chosen this technique instead of writing the entire story from third person point of view?
- Forman makes extended use of flashback to tell the story. Explain how the flashback scenes help us understand Mia's thoughts about living or dying.
- *If I Stay* is a superb example of internal conflict. Cite passages from the story that speak the strongest to Mia's struggle.
- Could the story have been titled *If I Leave*? Why or why not?