

READING GROUP GUIDE

Introduction

The Sanders family seems to have it all: Kim and her husband, Jeff, live with their two perfect children in a large house in a posh San Francisco neighborhood. But a Sweet Sixteen party for their daughter, Hannah, goes terribly wrong, upending their lives and the lives of those around them and exposing harsh truths about who they are as a family and as individuals. As readers shadow the characters through the aftermath of a gruesome accident, the façade of perfection falls away, revealing relationships strained by secrets, mistakes, and indiscretions. A lawsuit brings matters to a boil as neighbors, friends, and family members turn against each other. In this story of the unraveling of one well-to-do family is a much more expansive tale about how our desire for status and acceptance can wreak havoc in our lives and the ways that we judge one another while forgetting to first take a look at ourselves. *The Party* reveals the complicated matter of what it means to be human while cautioning us that it is what is inside of us—and not how people perceive us—that truly matters most.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Consider the organization of the story. Whose points of view are represented in the novel? Did any one point of view seem to overshadow the rest? Why do you think the

author made the decision to structure the book in this way? How did this structure influence your overall interpretation of the events in the book and your assessment of the characters?

2. How well would you say the characters in the book know each other? What are some of the secrets kept by the characters and why do they keep these secrets? Do they ever reveal or confess their secrets to the other characters? If so, what motivates them to do so and how are their secrets received?

3. What is “the incident” that Kim refers to in reference to her relationship with her husband, Jeff? How does Kim respond to “the incident” and do you agree with her reaction? How does “the incident” compare to Kim’s own indiscretions?

4. Evaluate the theme of judgment in the novel. Who judges one another and what seems to influence them in forming their judgments? As a reader, how did you judge the various characters and what caused you to do so? Did any of your judgments change by the book’s conclusion?

5. What seems to drive the characters’ moral choices? Do the characters seem to share any overlapping motivations? If so, what do they seem to be most motivated by? What might this suggest about human nature?

6. How do the characters respond to their own wrongdoing? Are they able to acknowledge and own up to their own mistakes? Do they seem contrite? Does the book

offer any examples of reconciliation, redemption, or peacemaking as the result of a character owning up to their mistake(s)? Discuss.

7. What does the novel suggest about appearances? Where do we find examples of things that are not what they seem? What causes the characters in the novel—or readers—to succumb to these misinterpretations?

8. How does Kim react to the tragedy that takes place at her daughter's Sweet Sixteen party? She is accused by some of the other characters of caring only about herself and her reputation. What causes them to believe this? Do you agree with their assessment of Kim's response or do you believe that she is misunderstood? Discuss.

9. Consider the motif of tragedy in the book. In addition to the central tragedy of the book, what other "minor" tragedies are exposed? What causes them? Do you believe that any of them could have been avoided? Explain.

10. What are Lisa's reasons for suing the Sanders family even after they are found clear of any wrongdoing by the investigators? Do you agree with her decision? Why or why not? What impact does the lawsuit have on those it involves?

11. At the story's conclusion, how has Hannah changed or otherwise remained the same? Does she seem to have learned anything from the ordeal?

12. Revisit the conclusion of the book. What happens to the Sanders family and to Ronni and Lisa? Were you surprised by the ending of the novel? Why or why not?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Consider an event that shaped the course of your own life or someone you know. Did the event unite or divide those it involved? How has your perspective of this event changed over time? Has anything positive ultimately come from this event? Discuss.

2. Use the novel as a starting place to consider the issue of bullying/cyberbullying among adolescents. What does the novel reveal about the culture around bullying? Visit stopbullying.gov to learn more, gather resources, and begin a discussion about ways you can help to prevent and/or stop bullying in your own community.

3. Compare *The Party* to other domestic or family dramas such as Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* or Herman Koch's *The Dinner*. Discuss what the books have in common, including any shared themes.

4. Visit the author's website at www.robbynharding.com to learn more about her and her other works including *The Journal of Mortifying Moments*, *Chronicles of a Mid-Life Crisis*, and *The Secret Desires of a Soccer Mom*.