

Southfield Public Library

The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards

Discussion questions used at SPL November -- 2009

Taken from ReadingGroupGuides.com

http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides3/memory_keepers_daughter1.asp

- 1.** When David hands his baby girl over to Caroline and tells Norah that she has died, what was your immediate emotional reaction? At this early point, did you understand David's motivations? Did your understanding grow as the novel progressed?
- 2.** David describes feeling like "an aberration" within his own family (p. 7) and describes himself as feeling like "an imposter" in his professional life as a doctor (p. 8). Discuss David's psyche, his history, and what led him to make that fateful decision on the night of his children's birth.
- 3.** When David instructs Caroline to take Phoebe to the institution, Caroline could have flatly refused or she could have gone to the authorities. Why doesn't she? Was she right to do what she did and raise Phoebe as her own? Was Caroline morally obligated to tell Norah the truth right from the beginning? Or was her moral obligation simply to take care of Phoebe at whatever cost? Why does she come to Norah after David's death?
- 4.** Though David wanted no part of her, Phoebe goes on to lead a full life, bringing much joy to Caroline and Al. Her story calls into question how we determine what kind of life is worth living. How would you define such a life? In contrast to Phoebe's, how would you describe the quality of Paul's life as he grew up?
- 5.** Throughout the novel, the characters often describe themselves as feeling as if they are watching their own lives from the outside. For instance, David describes the moment when his wife is going into labor and says "he felt strangely as if he himself were suspended in the room . . . watching them both from above" (p. 10). What do you think Edwards is trying to convey here? Have you ever experienced similar feelings in your own life?
- 6.** There is an obvious connection between David and Caroline, most aptly captured by a particular moment described through David's point of view: "Their eyes met, and it seemed to the doctor that he knew her --- that they knew each other --- in some profound and certain way" (p. 12). What is the significance of this moment for each of them? How would you describe the connection between them? Why do you think David married Norah and not Caroline?
- 7.** After Norah has successfully destroyed the wasps' nest, Edwards writes that there was something happening in Norah's life, "an explosion, some way in which life could

never be the same" (p. 139). What does she mean, and what is the significance of Norah's "fight" with these wasps?

8. When David meets Rosemary (p. 267) it turns out to be a cathartic experience for him. What is it about her that enables David to finally speak the truth? Why does he feel compelled to take care of her?

9. The secret that David keeps is enormous and ultimately terribly destructive to himself and his family. Can you imagine a circumstance when it might be the right choice to shield those closest to you from the truth?

10. What do you think Norah's reaction would have been if David had been honest with her from the beginning? How might Norah have responded to the news that she had a daughter with Down's Syndrome? How might each of their lives have been different if David had not handed Phoebe to Caroline that fateful day?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author's writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author's use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?