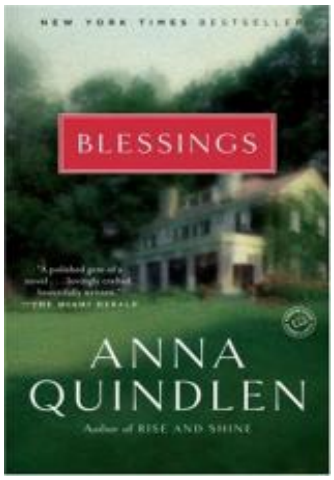
Blessings

by Anna Quindlen



About the Book

Blessings, the bestselling novel by the author of **Black and Blue**, **One True Thing**, **Object Lessons**, and **A Short Guide to a Happy Life**, begins when, late at night, a teenage couple drives up to the estate owned by Lydia Blessing and leaves a box.

In this instant, the world of the estate called Blessings is changed forever. The story of Skip Cuddy, the Blessings caretaker, who finds a baby asleep in that box and decides he wants to keep her, and of matriarch Lydia Blessing, who, for her own reasons, decides to help him, Blessings explores how the secrets of the past affect decisions and lives in the present; what makes a person, a life, legitimate or illegitimate, and who decides; the unique resources people find in themselves and in a community. This is a powerful novel of love, redemption, and personal change by the Pulitzer Prize?winning writer about whom *The Washington Post Book World* said, "Quindlen knows that all the things we ever will be can be found in some forgotten fragment of family."

Discussion Guide

1. Blessings is a title that holds a great deal of meaning for this book, as the name of the Blessings' house, but also in the metaphysical sense of the word.. Before reading the book, what did the title **Blessings** suggest to you? Did it create any expectations or shape the way you reflected on the book as you read? When you finished the book, what meaning did you take away from the title **Blessings**?

2. The *Washington Post* has said of Anna Quindlen's work, "Quindlen knows that all the things we ever will be can be found in some forgotten fragment of family." Family seems to be connected to many of the fundamental and important themes of the novel. How might this tribute be applied to **Blessings**?

3. The formation and preservation of family, traditional or not, is one of the prominent, underlying themes of the novel,

and Quindlen introduces us to several families throughout. Describe some of these families, their relationships, and the ways in which these families function as such. How are they similar? Different? What effect do these similarities or differences have on the characters and the story as a whole? Is one individual important in each group, if so, how?

4. How does Quindlen show the evolution of what is typically considered "family" over the course of the book? Do you think that Skip, Lydia, and Faith have formed a genuine family? If so, why, and if not, why not?

5. At the heart of **Blessings** is the issue of legitimacy. By traditional standards, both Meredith, Lydia's own daughter, and Faith would be deemed "illegitimate" children. When Faith's mother emerges, and seeks custody of her child, issues of the legitimacy of Faith's life with Skip are raised. What makes a person legitmate, or illegitimate today, or for you? Who decides, or who should decide?

6. In a society and a world that is constantly changing, is there such a thing as a "normal" family? What makes the "family" of **Blessings**?Skip, Lydia, and Faith?either normal or unusual, and what allows them to function as a family unit?

7. Love as a natural process is a prevalent theme in **Blessings**, and Quindlen shows it to be both instinctual and learned. Where do we see love as a natural instinct, and where do we see it as a learned quality? How do these differences in abilities and capacities for love shed light on the various characters? What do these emotional variations ultimately say about the nature of love and loyalty?

8. All of the main characters, including Faith, have histories that haunt them. Lydia harbors the memory of her brother, and Skip finds himself constantly trying to escape an unwarranted but poor reputation. In **Blessings**, how does the past become an influential part of the present? At what points does memory affect characters' actions in the present, or change the way in which a specific event is played out? Do either Lydia or Skip ever fully escape their pasts, or must they embrace them in order to lead fuller, more productive lives in the present?

9. The narrative structure of **Blessings** provides a literary framework that is important to the story and to our ability to connect with its characters. Describe the book's narrative structure. What effect did it have on your experience as a reader? Did the time-present/time-past structure of Lydia's story, interwoven with the day-to-day story of life at **Blessings** , allow her to be a more sympathetic character? How does the narrative structure of the novel parallel, tap into, and connect with some of the book's themes?

10. The notion of individuality figures prominently into **Blessings**, and brings up questions about the individual's place in the community, and the advantages and disadvantages of social conformity. Give some examples of scenes or situations from the book where the beliefs of an individual are challenged by the value system of a community. The situation which comes to the forefront of this issue is Skip's ultimate decision to return Faith to her birth-mother, so she can be raised in a more traditional family. Do you agree with Skip's decision? Were you satisfied with this conclusion? If not, how would you have liked to see it end?

11. Several characters discover a sense of redemption by the close of the novel. In what ways did you, as a reader, sense Skip and Lydia had been redeemed, and what were the causes of that process? The redemptive power of love is prevalent throughout. In what other characters do we see this change?

12. Quindlen uses dialogue as a tool not only to explain what a character is thinking or doing at the moment, but to provide insight into what moves and compels his or her actions and emotions. Through dialogue, Quindlen allows the reader to really get into the mind of a character. Discuss the nuances of the dialogue used throughout the book. How do speech patterns and thought patterns differ, and how do these differences influence your view and understanding of a given character?

13. Avid readers of Quindlen's work may be familiar with her non-fiction writings and journalism. As a Quindlen fan, was there anything about **Blessings** that reminded you of Quindlen's journalistic perspective?aspects such as astute observation of people, story-telling ability, etc.?that called to mind the skills of a good reporter?

Author Bio

Anna Quindlen is a novelist and journalist whose work has appeared on fiction, nonfiction and self-help bestseller lists. She is the author of many novels: OBJECT LESSONS, ONE TRUE THING, BLACK AND BLUE, BLESSINGS, RISE AND SHINE, EVERY LAST ONE, STILL LIFE WITH BREAD CRUMBS and MILLER'S VALLEY. Her memoir LOTS OF CANDLES, PLENTY OF CAKE, published in 2012, was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller. Her book A SHORT GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE has sold more than a million copies. While a columnist at *The New York Times*, she won the Pulitzer Prize and published two collections: LIVING OUT LOUD and THINKING OUT LOUD. Her *Newsweek* columns were collected in LOUD AND CLEAR.

Critical Praise

"A polished gem of a novel...lovingly crafted, beautifully written."

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