ReadingGroupGuides
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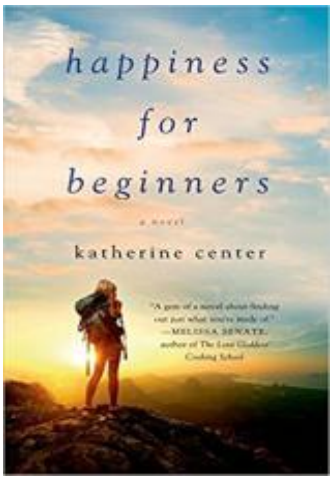
Happiness for Beginners

by Katherine Center



About the Book

A year after getting divorced, Helen Carpenter, 32, lets her annoying, 10 years younger brother talk her into signing up for a wilderness survival course. It's supposed to be a chance for her to pull herself together again, but when she discovers that her brother's even-more-annoying best friend is also coming on the trip, she can't imagine how it will be anything other than a disaster. Thus begins the strangest adventure of Helen's well-behaved life: three weeks in the remotest wilderness of a mountain range in Wyoming where she will survive mosquito infestations, a surprise summer blizzard and a group of sorority girls.

Yet, despite everything, the vast wilderness has a way of making Helen's own little life seem bigger, too. And, somehow the people who annoy her the most start teaching her the very things she needs to learn. Like how to stand up for herself. And how being scared can make you brave. And how sometimes you just have to get really, really lost before you can even have a hope of being found.

Discussion Guide

1. Helen decides to go into the wilderness because she thinks she needs to learn to be more brave. At first, in fact, she?s hoping to turn herself into a tough guy like Chuck Norris (?Chuck Norris can slam a revolving door.?) She doesn?t become *that* kind of brave --- but what other strengths does she find in herself?

2. Helen comes to see the kids on the hiking trip very differently as time goes on --- particularly Beckett. How does their relationship evolve?

3. Helen?s relationship with her brother Duncan changes quite a bit during the story. What about her time on the trip --- those experiences with those people --- allows her to see him differently? Would what GiGi told her on the day she paints her portrait have had the same impact if Helen hadn?t gone on the trip?

4. When Helen worries about Jake being ten years younger than she is, Grandma GiGi says, ?You know that doesn?t matter.? Does it matter? In what ways are Helen and Jake well-suited to each other? In what ways do you think they?ll clash?

5. Helen?s a bit of a fish out of water. At one point, wondering what she?s even doing there, she said, ?When Duncan first told me about this survival course, I?d been planning a trip to Paris. I?d given up *Paris* for the wisdom of the wilderness.?Have you ever forced yourself to do anything scary, or hard, or outside your comfort zone because you thought it would help you get stronger or wiser?

6. Windy says that ?getting what you want doesn?t make you happy? and ?happiness is more about appreciation than acquisition.? What do you think? Windy is a complicated mixture of likable friend and romantic foil. Was she an appealing character to you?

7. There?s something Helen really, really wants in the story that she doesn?t get. What do you think she?ll take away from that disappointment? How do you think she?ll learn from it?

8. Were there any particular quotes that stood out for you? Why?

Author Bio

BookPage calls Katherine Center ?the reigning queen of comfort reads.? She?s the *New York Times* bestselling author of 11 books, including HOW TO WALK AWAY, THINGS YOU SAVE IN A FIRE, WHAT YOU WISH FOR, THE BODYGUARD, HELLO STRANGER, THE ROM-COMMERS, THE LOVE HATERS and THE SHIPPERS. Katherine writes laugh-and-cry books about how life knocks us down --- and how we get back up. She?s been compared to both Jane Austen and Nora Ephron, and the Dallas *Morning News* calls her stories, ?satisfying in the most soul-nourishing way.?

Her books have made countless Best Of lists, including *RealSimple*?s Best Books of 2020, Amazon's Top 100 Books of 2019, Goodreads' Best Books of the Year, and many more. Bestselling author Emily Henry calls THE BODYGUARD ?a shot of pure joy.? The movie adaptation of Katherine?s novel THE LOST HUSBAND (starring Josh Duhamel) hit #1 on Netflix, and her novel HAPPINESS FOR BEGINNERS is in production now as a Netflix original starring Ellie Kemper.

Katherine lives in her hometown of Houston, Texas, with her husband, two kids and their fluffy-but-fierce dog.

Critical Praise

"Center?has written a wonderful story, a fast-paced read with sharp, perfectly written dialogue. Her newest does exactly what we want a good novel to do, introduce us to characters who engage us and take us on a journey."

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