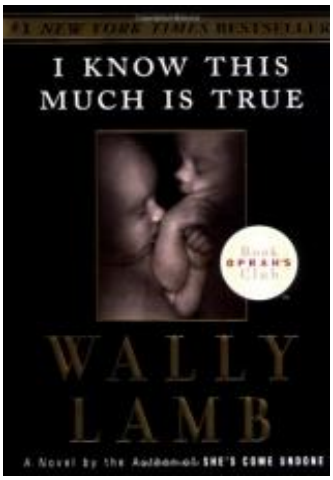
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

I Know This Much Is True

by Wally Lamb



About the Book

Wally Lamb's first novel, **She's Come Undone**, received rave reviews when it was published in 1992. The book was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Awards' Art Seidenbaum Prize for First Fiction and was named as one of the most notable books of the year by numerous publications, including The New York Times Book Review and People magazine. A graduate of the Vermont College MFA in Writing program, Lamb currently teaches at the University of Connecticut. He is the recipient of an NEA grant for fiction and a Missouri Review William Peden fiction prize winner. A nationally honored teacher of writing, he lives in Connecticut with his wife and their three sons.

"Reading a novel is a highly personal experience and I think different readers will take different things from it. As for me, the experience of writing the book has reinforced for me the truths that Dominick had to learn: that love grows from forgiveness, that "mongrels" make good dogs, and that the roundness of life's design may be a sign that there is a presence beyond ourselves."
--From a recent interview with Wally Lamb,
author of **I Know This Much Is True**

Discussion Guide

1. Wally Lamb has said that what interested him most about his character, Dominick Birdsey, was the protagonist's conflictedness. Discuss some of the ways in which, as both child and adult, Dominick is pulled in opposing directions and wrestles with conflicting emotions.

2. How does this novel reflect the attitudes toward and the treatment of the mentally ill as they have evolved through the 20th century?

3. Do you see Dominick Birdsey as a hero or an anti-hero? Why?

4. The author has commented that his discovery of an ancient Hindu myth, "The King and the Corpse," allowed him to discover, in turn, Dominick's story. In this ancient tale, a cadaver whispers riddles into the ears of a naive king and the solving of these puzzles allows the king to save himself. In what ways does the plot of I Know This Much Is True follow a similar path?

5. Wally Lamb has said, "Whereas Dolores Price, the main character of my first novel, *She's Come Undone*, deals with her pain and fear by imploding, Dominck tends to wrestle with pain and fear by exploding." Do females and males tend to respond differently to emotional pain? If so, why?

6. The principal female characters of this novel are Concettina Birdsey, Dessa Constantine, Lisa Sheffer, Dr. Rubina Patel, Ignazia Tempesta, and Prosperine Tucci (the monkey). Discuss *I Know This Much Is True's* depiction of women.

7. Wally Lamb has stated that a worthwhile novel should not only draw you into the story but also kick you in the pants so that you'll be more inclined to go out and fix the world. Do you agree or disagree?

8. *I Know This Much Is True* is in development as a major motion picture. If you were the casting director, which actors would you choose for the major roles?

9. Discuss the themes of mirror vs. images, wholeness vs. fragmentation, connection vs. separation as they are explored in I Know This Much Is True.

10. To what extent is Dominick Birdsey's life shaped by his ethnicity? To what extent do you feel your life is defined by the place and the culture of your forebearers? Discuss.

Author Bio

Wally Lamb is the author of six *New York Times* bestselling novels: I?LL TAKE YOU THERE, WE ARE WATER, WISHIN? AND HOPIN?, THE HOUR I FIRST BELIEVED, I KNOW THIS MUCH IS TRUE and SHE?S COME UNDONE. Lamb also edited COULDN'T KEEP IT TO MYSELF and I'LL FLY AWAY, two volumes of essays from students in his writing workshop at York Correctional Institution, a women?s prison in Connecticut, where he was a volunteer facilitator for 20 years. Lamb lives in Connecticut with his wife, Christine, and they have three sons.

Critical Praise

"It never grapples with anything less than life's biggest questions.... Lamb clearly aims to be a modern-day Dostoyevsky with a pop sensibility. "

I Know This Much Is True

by Wally Lamb

Publication Date: May 1, 1999
Paperback: 912 pages
Publisher: Harper Perennial
ISBN-10: 0060987561
ISBN-13: 9780060987565