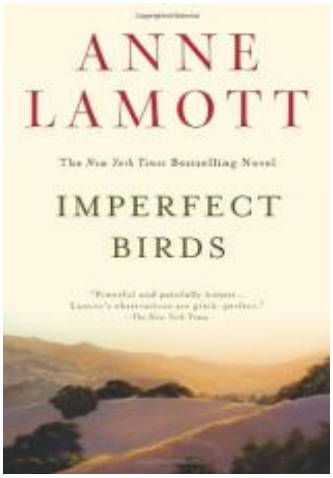
Imperfect Birds

by Anne Lamott



About the Book

Rosie Ferguson, 17, is smart, athletic and beautiful --- everything her mother, Elizabeth, and stepfather, James, hoped she could be. But there are disturbing signs that the well-adjusted teenage life Rosie claims to be leading is a sham, and that Elizabeth?s hopes for her daughter to remain immune from the world?s darker impulses are dashed. Slowly and painfully, Elizabeth and James are forced to confront the fact that Rosie has been lying to them --- and that her deceptions have profound consequences on them all.

Discussion Guide

1. How do you interpret the opening sentence of the book, ?There are so many evils that pull on our children??

2. In the opening pages of the novel, Elizabeth is aware of the questionable behavior of the teenagers in Landsdale, ?Rosie was apparently not nearly as awful as many of the town?s teenage girls, not by a long shot.? She sees the kids in the Parkade, she knows about the abortions the high school girls have had. How does her knowledge of what goes in on in Landsdale affect Elizabeth?s behavior?

3. Elizabeth says that living with a teenager is like ?having a low grade bladder infection. It hurts, but you had to tough it out.? Do you agree? Why or why not? Do you remember what it was like to be a teenager? Did you think your parents were totally ?loked? the way that Rosie thinks of James and Elizabeth? Why or why not?

4. Are Elizabeth and James good parents? Why or why not?

5. Why did Robert Tobias ask Rosie to give him tennis lessons? Do you think even his asking was inappropriate? That it gave Rosie the wrong idea? Why or why not? Where, if at all, did Mr. Tobias cross the line with Rosie? How have the lines between teacher and student changed since you were in school? Or haven?t they?

6. When Elizabeth first found the Valiums in Rosie?s jeans, her ?stomach dropped? and she told herself there was a reasonable explanation and confronted Rosie. Do you think Elizabeth was right to trust Rosie?s explanation, even though she knew what other kids in the town were doing in their spare time? As the novel progresses, Elizabeth often chooses to trust Rosie over her own instincts. How could Elizabeth have acted differently? How much or how little do you think parents should trust their children?

7. In many of her books like Grace (Eventually) and Plan B, Anne Lamott gives us an irreverent, but positive look at the role of faith and religion in her life. Elizabeth uses faith as a way to cope with her alcoholism, Rosie?s behavior and her own actions. What do you think Anne is trying to say about faith in this book?

8. What do you think Rosie is getting out of her experimentation with drugs and alcohol? What of her relationship with Fenn? Why do you think Elizabeth and James trust Fenn?

9. Do you think the rules James and Elizabeth set up after Rosie was arrested were fair? What would you have done differently? Do you think there was a way for Elizabeth and James to discover all that Rosie was keeping from them?

10. Elizabeth is obsessed with Rosie being open and honest with her and she?s terrified of them growing apart. When does this change? And why? When does Elizabeth decide she must let go?

11. What do you think will happen to James, Rosie and Elizabeth after Rosie comes back home from the wilderness program?

12. Do you think it was the right decision to send Rosie to the wilderness program in Utah? How do you think it has changed her? Will it make the lasting impression that Rosie needs to change her behavior for good?

Author Bio

Anne Lamott is the author of 20 books, including the *New York Times* bestsellers HELP, THANKS, WOW; DUSK, NIGHT, DAWN; TRAVELING MERCIES; and BIRD BY BIRD, as well as seven novels. A recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and an inductee to the California Hall of Fame, she lives in Northern California with her family.

Critical Praise

"Anne Lamott is a cause for celebration? She is nothing short of miraculous."

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