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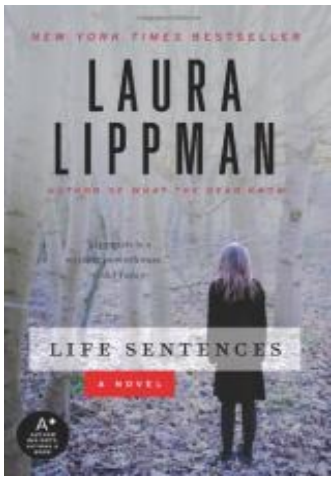
Life Sentences

by Laura Lippman



About the Book

Available March 2nd!

A successful memoirist returns home to Baltimore to see if she can find a new angle for her next book. She decides that she will braid a modern story about a former classmate, accused of a heinous crime, with a reminiscence of her grade-school years, and turns to old friends for help. But as she digs deeper into the tragedy surrounding her old classmate, she begins to see that everything she thought she knew about her life might be quite different.

Discussion Guide

1. Life Sentences suggests that stories belong to whomever tells them. Is that fair, unfair? Under what circumstances, if any, does a story --- a life --- belong only to the person who lived it?

2. Is Cassandra a likable person, or at least an ethical one? Does it matter if she's likable?

3. Was Cassandra's memoir, **Her Father's Daughter**, "true"?

4. What do you think happened to Callie's son? Does she tell Cassandra the truth, or the truth as she needs to believe it? Is there a difference?

5. Life Sentences has many references to myths and folk tales --- stories of the ancient Greeks, but also Br'er Rabbit. What myths do the characters need in order to go about their day-to-day lives? Does Tisha have a myth that sustains her? Gloria Bustamante?

6. Cassandra is white, most of her childhood friends were African-American (as was her stepmother) and Gloria

Bustamanate is Latina. But is race that central to the story of **Life Sentences**? In what ways?

7. Why does Lenore allow her husband's version of events to stand uncontested?

8. Is Cedric Fallows self-aware? Does he have any sense of the way he has affected his daughter?

9. What has Cassandra learned beyond the facts of her own life and Callie's life? Does she change over the course of this book? In what ways? Would the Cassandra we meet in that opening chapter make the same choices that Cassandra makes at the book's end?

10. What point is Tisha trying to make when she shows Cassandra a small inaccuracy in Her Father's Daughter?

11. On the last page of the novel, Callie passes a sign that Cassandra has also noticed: If you lived here, you would be home by now. Cassandra had wondered if the sign was a tautology, or at least mildly redundant. But Callie responds to the sign very differently. What does this tell us about Cassandra and Callie? Where is Callie --- in her life --- at the book's end? Has she found a home in the world? Has she at last made all the lies true?

Author Bio

Since Laura Lippman?s debut, she has been recognized as a distinctive voice in mystery fiction and named one of the ?essential? crime writers of the last 100 years. Stephen King called her ?special, even extraordinary,? and Gillian Flynn wrote, ?She is simply a brilliant novelist.? Her books have won most of the major awards in her field and been translated into more than 25 languages. She lives in Baltimore and New Orleans with her daughter.

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