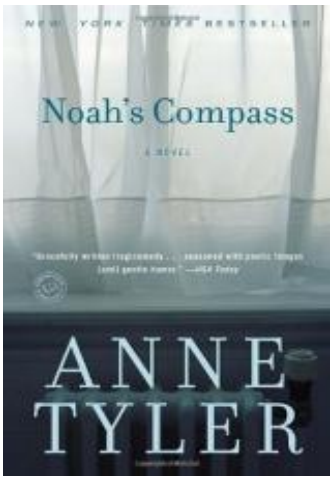
ReadingGroupGuides
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Noah?s Compass

by Anne Tyler



About the Book

Liam Pennywell is a man of unexceptional talents, plain demeanor, modest means and curtailed ambition. At age 60, he's been fired from his teaching job at a second-rate private boys' school in Baltimore, a job below his academic training and original expectations. An unsentimental, noncontemplative survivor of two failed marriages and the emotionally detached father of three grown daughters, Liam is jolted into alarm after he's attacked in his apartment and loses all memory of the experience. His search to recover those lost hours leads him into an uneasy exploration of his disappointing life and into an unlikely new relationship with Eunice, a socially inept walking fashion disaster who is half his age. She is also spontaneous and enthusiastic, and Liam longs to cast off his inertia and embrace the joyous recklessness that he feels in her company.

Discussion Guide

1. When Anne Tyler was just starting to write **Noah?s Compass**, a journalist asked her what it was about. She replied, ?I?d like to write about a man who feels he has nothing more to expect from his life; but it?s anybody?s guess what the real subject will turn out to be in the end.? Did that turn out to be the real subject of the book?

2. What does the title mean?

3. After reading the first chapter, did you have any idea where the story would lead?

4. On page 26, Tyler writes, ?The distressing thing about losing a memory, he thought, was that it felt like losing control.? Why is Liam so interested in control?

5. Is this really the first memory he?s lost?

6. At the top of page 49, Liam thinks about his true self, and how it seemed to have disappeared after the incident. What does Liam consider to be his ?true self?? Is he right?

7. Why does Liam become so obsessed with Ishmael Cope?

8. Discuss Liam?s attitude toward women. Does he treat his blood relatives differently from Barbara and Eunice? Why or why not?

9. Why does Liam?s initial impression of Eunice transform into something completely different? Why does he keep their relationship a secret from his daughters?

10. What does religion represent in the novel?

11. On page 186, Eunice insists, ?I?m not?devious, Liam!? What does she mean by this? Does she actually believe it?

12. What does the palm-reading scene on page 204?5 tell us about Liam? What point is Tyler making?

13. Reread Barbara?s description of Liam on page 224. Is it accurate? Why or why not?

14. Ultimately, why does Liam turn Eunice away, soon after telling her, ?You?re the woman I love, and life is too short to go through it without you!? (page 230)?

15. When does Liam stop wishing he could remember the break-in? Why?

16. On page 243 Liam wonders, ?Why was it that he had known so many sad women?? How would you answer this question?

17. What is the meaning of the Epictetus quote on page 266? What does Liam intend by reciting it?

18. Discuss the ending. Is Liam happy?

Author Bio

Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1941 and grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is the author of more than 20 novels. Her 20th novel, A SPOOL OF BLUE THREAD, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2015. Her 11th novel, BREATHING LESSONS, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1989. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

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