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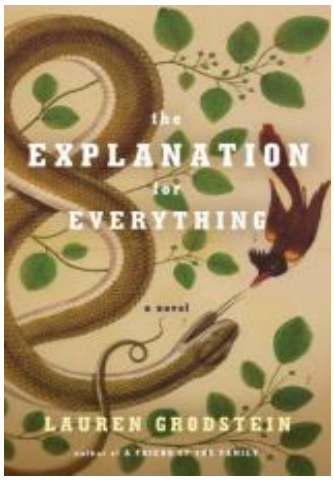
The Explanation for Everything

by Lauren Grodstein



About the Book

As she did in the bestselling novel A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, Lauren Grodstein has written another provocative morality tale, this time dissecting the permeable line between faith and doubt.

College professor Andy Waite is picking up the pieces of a shattered life. Between his research in evolutionary biology and caring for his young daughters, his days are reassuringly safe, if a bit lonely. But when Melissa Potter --- charismatic, unpredictable and devout --- asks him to advise her study of intelligent design, he agrees. Suddenly, the world that Andy has fought to rebuild is rocked to its foundations.

Discussion Guide

1.) In THE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING, Andy Waite is a confirmed atheist who doesn't believe in the supernatural, yet he's convinced he's being trailed by his wife's ghost. To what extent are these contradictory beliefs shaped by grief? To what extent do we all live with contradictions about our faith?

2.) Do you think Andy is a good professor? Why or why not?

3.) Andy keeps asking himself, and anyone else who will listen, whether God is a figure of mercy or justice?he doesn't believe God can be both. Are mercy and justice opposing qualities? How do they work to oppose each other in our culture?

4.) Why do you think Melissa Potter was so invested in changing Andy's mind about religion? Were her intentions fueled by faith, romantic interest, or a genuine interest in his well-being?

5.) Books and letters play an important role in this novel. Why do you think Andy took such solace in the opposing works of Hank Rosenblum and Pastor Cling? Are those works really so oppositional?

6.) Throughout the novel, Andy finds purpose in being angry, but he also seems tired of being angry. In what ways does he go about finding peace? What other avenues toward peace do Sheila, Rosenblum, Melissa, and his daughters offer him?

7.) At different points in the book, Lionel Shell finds himself equally zealous about creationism and atheism. Why might a person believe so passionately in both sides of the argument? How are both ideologies a kind of faith?

8.) Anita Lim is destroyed, in part, by turning from science to faith. Do you think her acceptance of a loving God was responsible for her demise? If not, then what was responsible?

9.) Andy's daughter Belle longs to be baptized. What do you think this religious ritual means to her? What does it mean to Andy to witness her baptism?

10.) The deeper Andy investigates God, the less charitable his treatment of his neighbor, Sheila. In the end, is it the atheist, Rosenblum, who reminds Andy of his responsibility to his fellow man? Why do you think Andy treated Sheila so shabbily?

11.) How does Andy's trip to Florida affect his feelings about his work?

12.) Throughout the novel, Andy finds solace in his daughters, in how much he loves them and how much they remind him of Lou. How does parenthood provide Andy reasons to pursue his research, his letters to McGee, and his own

isolation?

13.) Why do you think Rosenblum wrote to Andy toward the end of his life?

14.) What are the different ways that Darwin and Darwinian theory get used throughout the novel?

15.) THE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING is a book about faith and evolutionary theory that doesn't take sides. In the real world, is it possible not to take sides on this debate? What are the consequences of accepting both possibilities?

Author Bio

Lauren Grodstein is the author of six novels, including A DOG IN GEORGIA, the "Read with Jenna" selection WE MUST NOT THINK OF OURSELVES, the *New York Times* bestseller A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, and the *Washington Post* Book of the Year THE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING.

Lauren?s work has been translated into French, Turkish, German, Hebrew and other languages, and her essays and reviews have been widely published. She teaches in the MFA Program at Rutgers University-Camden and lives in New Jersey with her husband and children.

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