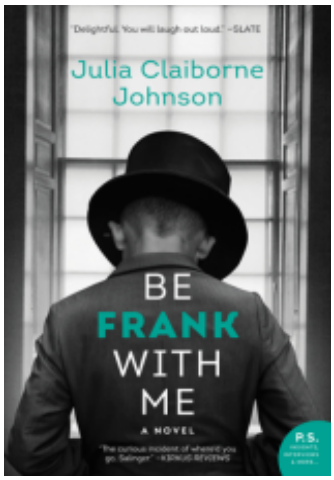
ReadingGroupGuides
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Be Frank With Me

by Julia Claiborne Johnson



About the Book

A sparkling talent makes her fiction debut with this infectious novel that combines the charming pluck of Eloise, the poignant psychological quirks of THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME and the page-turning spirit of WHERE?D YOU GO, BERNADETTE.

Reclusive literary legend M. M. ?Mimi? Banning has been holed up in her Bel Air mansion for years. But after falling prey to a Bernie Madoff-style ponzi scheme, she?s flat broke. Now Mimi must write a new book for the first time in decades, and to ensure the timely delivery of her manuscript, her New York publisher sends an assistant to monitor her progress. The prickly Mimi reluctantly complies --- with a few stipulations: No Ivy-Leaguers or English majors. Must drive, cook, tidy. Computer whiz. Good with kids. Quiet, discreet, sane.

When Alice Whitley arrives at the Banning mansion, she?s put to work right away --- as a full-time companion to Frank, the writer?s eccentric nine-year-old, a boy with the wit of Noel Coward, the wardrobe of a 1930s movie star, and very little in common with his fellow fourth-graders.

As she slowly gets to know Frank, Alice becomes consumed with finding out who Frank?s father is, how his gorgeous ?piano teacher and itinerant male role model? Xander fits into the Banning family equation --- and whether Mimi will ever finish that book.

Full of heart and countless ?only-in-Hollywood? moments, BE FRANK WITH ME is a captivating and unconventional story of an unusual mother and son, and the intrepid young woman who finds herself irresistibly pulled into their unforgettable world.

Discussion Guide

Introduction

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Questions for DIscussion

1. How does the author use physical details and dialogue to quickly establish who the character of Frank is? What were the passages that really made Frank come alive for you?

2. Can you think of a few authors who might have inspired the character of M.M. Banning? Did any of these authors write a book that was meaningful to you?

3. In what ways does the author contrast the Old Hollywood that Frank loves with the new Los Angeles which he inhabits?

4. Why do you think Alice lies and says she has not read Mimi?s book? What advantage does this give her?

5. Frank is never given an explicit diagnosis of autism, though he does have remarkable gifts and an unorthodox way of interacting socially that suggests he falls somewhere on the spectrum. Do you think the author made a conscious choice to avoid giving Frank a diagnosis of any kind? If so, why?

6. A security guard mistaking Alice for Frank?s mother says, ?You need to fill the house up with more like him. You need to fill up the world.? Over the past decade the number of children with autism has risen significantly. There are

theories that autism is a rapid form of evolution. Do you think this is possible? What are some of Frank?s traits that would support success in today?s society or in a future society?

7. In Chapter 14, when Alice says, ?If you?d like to keep believing in the perfection of Xander Devlin?you?ll need to ignore certain events that occurred during this time,? what do you think the author is trying to show us about Xander, and about his relationships with both Alice and Mimi?

8. Do you think Mimi was right to buy t-shirts and jeans for Frank? Why or why not?

9. What do you think Xander means when he tells Alice that she?s ?not curious,? but selfish? Do you agree?

10. Why do you think Mimi is so dismissive of Alice when Alice is only trying to help her?

11. Why do you think Mimi needed to leave and go to the motel? What exactly did she need a break from?

12. Alice, Mimi, Frank, Xander and Mr. Vargas have all learned things from each other by the end of the novel. What are some of the things they?ve helped each other realize?

Author Bio

Julia Claiborne Johnson is the author of BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME and the bestselling BE FRANK WITH ME, a finalist for the American Bookseller?s Association Best Debut Novel Award. She grew up on a farm in Tennessee before moving to New York City, where she worked at *Mademoiselle* and *Glamour* magazines. She now lives in Los Angeles with her comedy-writer husband and their two children.

Critical Praise

?Readers will find themselves captivated.?

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