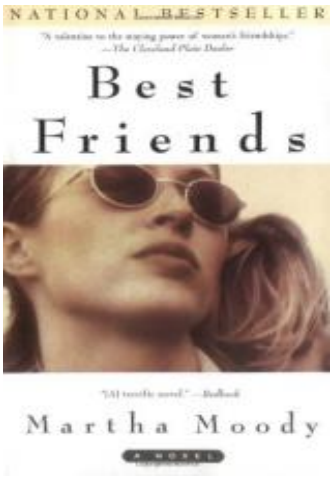
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Best Friends

by Martha Moody



About the Book

"You'll definitely see elements of yourself and your girlfriends in this terrific novel," is how *Redbook* described **Best Friends** --- which may explain why this first novel from an unknown author has been quietly building to a surprising hardcover success. It's the kind of book that is shared among friends, an instantly familiar and emotionally immediate story of two women who become college roommates, confidantes, and friends for life.

Clare, from a working-class Protestant family, has never met anyone like Sally: wealthy, pretty, and Jewish, barely emancipated from her close-knit Los Angeles family. Over the decades, Clare is drawn deeper into the circle of Sally's family --- until she uncovers the kind of secret that no one wants to tell a best friend.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss Clare's first impression of Sally. How accurate is it? Based on Clare's comparisons of herself to her new roommate, what is your first impression of Clare? Despite their rocky beginning, Clare and Sally become great friends in college. What do you think they find appealing in one another?

2. Even though they are best friends, Sally and Clare keep certain secrets from one another. Discuss some of the secrets each keeps and why. Are they only trying to protect one another, or do they have selfish motives at heart? How does this affect their friendship, in the long run?

3. How would you explain Sally's intense desire to be part of a "unit"? Does either Sally or Clare ever become a unit in a romantic relationship? What do you make of Clare's telling Sally (page 436), "We're the unit." Do you agree? Why do you think Sally reacts as she does?

4. Sally and Clare choose demanding careers. How do their professions, law and medicine, validate and/or challenge

their images of each other? How does each change in her own estimation?

5. How did Sally and Clare's friendship change throughout the novel? Do you think they became closer over time, or less so? Why do you think they were able to remain friends, even as their lives and perceptions of one another changed?

6. When Sally first finds out how her father made his fortune, she is at pains to justify it to herself and to Clare. She mentions her college boyfriend, Timbo, as an example of someone who was "a victim of sex" and says that "maybe adult magazines, by bringing things out into the open, make people less likely to be victims" (page 167). Do you agree? Can you think of some other characters in the book whom Sally might characterize as victims of sex?

7. Discuss the impact Sid Rose's business has on his family. What role does it play in Sally's formation? In Ben's demise? In Sid's marriage? What do you make of Sid's targeting the gay pornography market, in light of his prejudice against gay people? Do you believe his assertion that it is only about increasing his profits?

8. Both Clare and Sally are very close to their fathers. When Clare shares her suspicion that her father embezzled money from the medical practice he managed, Sally defends him: "Oh, Clare. If he did it, he did it for you" (page 66). Sid Rose makes a similar argument to defend his business to his daughter. How does Clare's father's moral lapse compare to Sid Rose's? Does his relative poverty make his crime less blameworthy, in your opinion? Is there a connection between Clare's disgust with Sid Rose and her forgiveness of her own father? Does Sally ever forgive her father?

9. Sally and Clare both long for children. Does having children help them heal their distant relationships with their own mothers? How does motherhood affect their friendship? What do you make of Clare's "obvious disappointment" at Sally's third pregnancy (page 305)? How does Sally feel about Clare's choices?

10. Were you surprised at the lengths Sally went to, after Esther's death, to keep Ben in "happy families"? Were her actions justifiable? In the end, is Sally as complicit in Ben's death as their father? Why do you think Clare goes with Sally on her mission, even though she is initially disgusted by the idea? In your opinion, does Esther also share some measure of responsibility?

11. The Roses had wilted...They'd become like anybody else, any sad and bickering little family. My magical L.A. nights with them were gone" (page 121). Discuss Clare's initial, glowing attraction to the Rose family and its eventual tarnish. How does it compare to her relationship with her own family?

12. What do you make of the fraught relationship between Clare and Sid Rose? Why do you think Sid chooses to make his "confession" to Clare? How does this affect Clare and Sally's friendship?

13. Do you think that Sid Rose killed his son? Why or why not?

Author Bio

Martha Moody is a physician living in Dayton, Ohio, with her husband and four sons. Her short story, **Like the Arrival of Angels**, was a finalist for the Best American Short Stories of 1985. **Best Friends** is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"So freshly observed and gifted with such a powerful sense of the ravages of time that it feels utterly new...The book never loses its edge, at once compassionate and humorous."

Best Friends

by Martha Moody

Publication Date: June 4, 2002
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 496 pages
Publisher: Riverhead Trade
ISBN-10: 1573229350
ISBN-13: 9781573229357