ReadingGroupGuides
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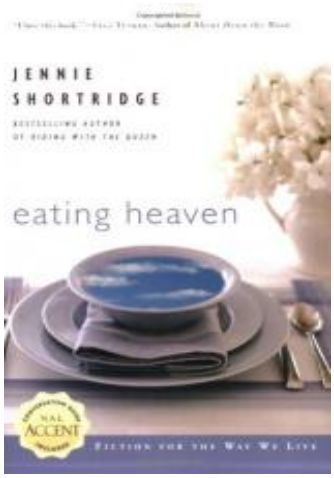
Eating Heaven

by Jennie Shortridge



About the Book

Eleanor Samuels, a large and lonely food magazine writer, has some big-time food "issues" of her own. Faced with her favorite uncle's terminal illness, Eleanor becomes his primary caretaker, feeding him all his favorite foods one last time. As she cooks and cleans and tends to Uncle Benny's increasing needs, she discovers long-buried secrets about her emotionally frayed family that tear her world apart. Through cooking, nurturing, and a delicious flirtation with a new chef in town, Eleanor comes to terms with eating and love, family and forgiveness, and becoming comfortable in her own skin.

Discussion Guide

1. The characters in this novel are struggling to learn how to properly care for one another on many different levels. In what ways do they succeed or fail to be nurturing?

2. How does Eleanor's attitude toward food change throughout the book? What does her inability to vomit signify in her life? Her decrease in appetite?

3. The author does not reveal Eleanor's actual size. Why do you think she made this decision, and how do you feel about it? What do you imagine Eleanor's size to be, and how does it differ from or match your group members' perceptions?

4. Food is described so intimately and beautifully in Eating Heaven, it is almost a character itself. How does the author use food to tell the story? Find passages where food reveals emotions, desires, connections, or conflicts.

5. What spurs Eleanor to see Suzanne Long, the food therapist? Why does she stop seeing her? What does Eleanor learn from Suzanne, and what does she learn on her own?

6. Why does Bebe refuse to see Benny, even when he is dying?

7. What is Bebe referring to when she tells Eleanor on page 199, 'Benny isn't quite the angel you think he is?' How did your perceptions of Bebe and of her relationship with Benny change over the course of the story?

8. What would you do, if you found out that your family had a secret they had kept from you all your life?

9. Eleanor eats when she is stressed or upset. How do Anne and Christine cope with their life-changing problems?

10. What, for Benny, is the most difficult part of his illness?

11. Think about the men in Eleanor's life --- Benny, Stefan, Henry, and the memory of her father. How are these relationships similar? Different? What issues, if any, does she resolve with them by the end of the book, and how?

Author Bio

Jennie Shortridge has published five novels: LOVE WATER MEMORY, WHEN SHE FLEW, LOVE AND BIOLOGY AT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE, EATING HEAVEN and RIDING WITH THE QUEEN. When not writing, teaching writing workshops, or volunteering with kids, Jennie stays busy as a founding member of Seattle7Writers.org, a collective of Northwest authors devoted both to raising funds for community literacy projects and to raising awareness of Northwest literature.

Critical Praise

"Smooth writing, a cast of nicely developed characters, and a winning portrait of Portland, Oregon add up to one good read."

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