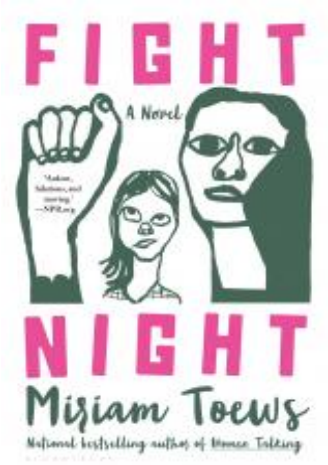
Fight Night

by Miriam Toews



About the Book

From the bestselling author of WOMEN TALKING and ALL MY PUNY SORROWS, a compassionate, darkly humorous and deeply wise new novel about three generations of women.

?You're a small thing,? Grandma writes, ?and you must learn to fight.? Swiv's Grandma, Elvira, has been fighting all her life. From her upbringing in a strict religious community, she has fought those who wanted to take away her joy, her independence and her spirit. She has fought to make peace with her loved ones when they have chosen to leave her. And now, even as her health fails, Grandma is fighting for her family: for her daughter, partnerless and in the third term of a pregnancy; and for her granddaughter Swiv, a spirited nine-year-old who has been suspended from school. Cramped together in their Toronto home, on the precipice of extraordinary change, Grandma and Swiv undertake a vital new project, setting out to explain their lives in letters they will never send.

Alternating between the exuberant, precocious voice of young Swiv and her irrepressible, tenacious Grandma, FIGHT NIGHT is a love letter to mothers and grandmothers, and to all the women who are still fighting --- painfully, ferociously --- for a way to live on their own terms.

Discussion Guide

1. Think about the title FIGHT NIGHT. Why do you think Toews chose this title? What are the characters fighting?

2. Who is the book addressed to, and why is this character not present in Swiv?s life? Why do you think Toews chose a letter for the novel?s form? What other formal choices do you notice?

3. What kind of kid is Swiv? What makes you think so?

4. What about Grandma/Elvira and Mom/Mooshie? What kind of people are they, and does Swiv see them clearly?

5. Toews often uses exaggerations in Swiv?s narration. What is the effect of this choice? What other idiosyncrasies do you notice?

6. What does Swiv mean when she refers to her family?s Editorial Meetings? How do the meetings themselves differ from what we might assume based on that phrase? Why do you think she uses it?

7. Who is Willit Braun? Why is he so infamous in Grandma?s circles?

8. In Chapter 10, the book changes stylistically, reflecting a transcription of Grandma?s words. How did this change impact your reading?

9. What happened to Mom/Mooshie in Albania? Why and how does this discovery influence your perception of her character?

10. Talk about Grandma and Swiv?s trip to Fresno. Why was it necessary for Grandma to go on the trip, despite her poor health?

11. In Fresno, the people Swiv meets talk about how strong Mom/Mooshie is. How did you understand this emphasis? How did you understand Mom?s reaction when Swiv reports this back to her?

12. Talk about the first time Gord meets Grandma at the hospital. What can we glean from the scene?

13. Depression and other forms of mental illness go unnamed in FIGHT NIGHT, but they remain present in the background. How does Toews achieve this? How does she approach these realities?

14. Talk about the tone of the book in contrast to what happens in the book. How do these two elements work together?

15. Recommended: Read Miriam Toews? ALL MY PUNY SORROWS and discuss the two novels together. What overlaps in subject matter do you see? How do the two books deal differently with family, humor and bravery?

Author Bio

Miriam Toews is the author of the bestselling novels ALL MY PUNY SORROWS, SUMMER OF MY AMAZING LUCK, A BOY OF GOOD BREEDING, A COMPLICATED KINDNESS, THE FLYING TROUTMANS, IRMA VOTH, WOMEN TALKING and FIGHT NIGHT, and two works of nonfiction: SWING LOW: A Life and A TRUCE THAT IS NOT PEACE. She is winner of the Governor General?s Award for Fiction, the Libris Award for Fiction Book of the Year, the Rogers Writers? Trust Fiction Prize, and the Writers? Trust Engel/Findley Award. She lives in Toronto.

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