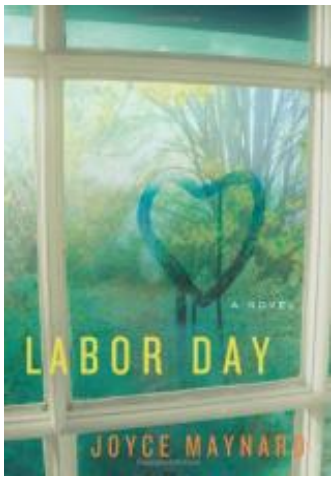
Labor Day

by Joyce Maynard



About the Book

In a manner evoking Ian McEwan's **Atonement** and Nick Hornby's **About a Boy**, Joyce Maynard tells a story of love, sexual passion, painful adolescence, and devastating betrayal as seen through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old boy --- and the man he later becomes --- looking back on the events of one long, hot, and life-altering weekend.

Discussion Guide

1. As reported by Henry, his mother Adele displays a number of behaviors that could be interpreted as crazy. How do you explain her son?s steadiness and competence? Do you consider Adele to be a bad mother?

2. When you were first introduced to the character of Frank (p. 5), what was your feeling about him? As you learned more about Frank over the course of the story, did your impression of him change? If so, what details and actions can you identify that caused you to alter your opinion of him?

3. Were you surprised that Adele was willing to bring Frank to her home? Why do you think she did?

4. Henry?s father and his wife, Marjorie, live a much more steady and ?normal? life than the one Henry shares with Adele. Why do you think Henry remains so loyal to his mother, concealing aspects of her behavior that would no doubt alarm his father?

5. Were you surprised to discover than Frank is a good baker? What does his baking ability tell you about him? Why do you think the author chose to offer such a detailed description of Frank?s pie-making technique?

6. The novel is set at a time during which a number of transitions are taking place in the lives of the main characters. What transition if Henry going through? Adele? Frank? How is that feeling of transition echoed in the time period in

which the story is framed (the end of summer and the beginning of the school year)?

7. Henry often refers to a ?normal family,? a ?regular family,? a ?family.? What does the concept of family mean to Henry? What does the term ?normal family? mean to you?

8. What was your first impression of the character of Eleanor? Did this impression change as you got to know her better? Why do you think Eleanor behaves as she does?

9. How does Eleanor go about instilling fear and doubts about Frank in Henry? Why do you think she does this? What is she hoping to accomplish?

10. In Chapter 18 Henry comments that seeing his mother happy with Frank ?took me off the hook.? At the same time, he appears to be threatened by the possibility that the intimacy she has discovered with Frank will cause her to abandon him. How does Henry go about reconciling these two conflicting responses to the love affair he witnesses, and how much of what takes place occurs as a result of this conflict?

11. How do you think the events of that Labor Day weekend changed Henry? How might his life have gone if Frank had not shown up?

12. Why do you think Adele relinquishes custody of Henry? Why does he decide to return to her?

13. Were you surprised by what Henry says and does when he encounters Eleanor again, a year later, walking her dog? What do you think has caused Eleanor to become the person she is? Why is her dog named Jim?

14. What does Henry?s father mean when he observes that Adele ?was in love with love??

15. Frank?s experience with Adele and Henry cost him eighteen years of his life, and yet he expresses gratitude for having met them. How can this be? Do you believe the kind of love that existed between Adele and Frank can truly exist?

Author Bio

Joyce Maynard is the *New York Times* bestselling author of 14 novels and five books of nonfiction, as well as the syndicated column "Domestic Affairs." Her memoir, AT HOME IN THE WORLD, has been translated into 18 languages. Her novels TO DIE FOR and LABOR DAY were both adapted for film. She is a fellow of MacDowell and Yaddo artists' residencies.

When not running her hotel/retreat center, Casa Paloma, in Guatemala --- where she mentors women in the telling of their stories --- she makes her home in Northern California and in the state of New Hampshire.

Labor Day

by Joyce Maynard

Publication Date: July 28, 2009
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 256 pages
Publisher: William Morrow
ISBN-10: 0061843407
ISBN-13: 9780061843402