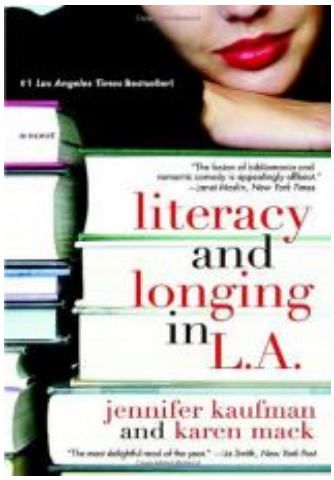
Literacy and Longing in L.A.

by Jennifer Kaufman and Karen Mack



About the Book

Some women shop. Some women eat.

Dora cures the blues by bingeing on books --- reading one after another, from Flaubert to bodice rippers, for hours and days on end. In this wickedly funny and sexy literary debut, we meet the beguiling, beautiful Dora, whose unique voice combines a wry wit and vulnerability as she navigates the road between reality and fiction.

Dora, named after Eudora Welty, is an indiscriminate book junkie whose life has fallen apart -- her career, her marriage, and finally her self-esteem. All she has left is her love of literature, and the book benders she relied on as a child. Ever since her larger-than-life father wandered away and her book-loving, alcoholic mother was left with two young daughters, Dora and her sister, Virginia, have clung to each other, enduring a childhood filled with literary pilgrimages instead of summer vacations. Somewhere along the way Virginia made the leap into the real world. But Dora isn?t quite there yet. Now she?s coping with a painful separation from her husband, scraping the bottom of a dwindling inheritance, and attracted to a seductive book-seller who seems to embody all that literature has to offer --intelligent ideas, romance, and an escape from her problems.

Joining Dora in her odyssey is an elderly society hair-brusher, a heartbroken young girl, a hilarious off-the-wall female teamster, and Dora?s mother, now on the wagon, trying to make amends...

Discussion Guide

1. Dora?s passion for literature infuses everything she does. How has literature played a role in your life? Have books ever carried you through rough times?

2.Longing is only one of the universal themes/issues that the book explores. Others include abandonment, social

acceptance and escape. Discuss how these themes are woven into the book.

3. Dora often refers to classics from her childhood like **The Wind in the Willows** and **A Wrinkle in Time**. What book from your childhood still resonates with you? Have you ever re-read it? Do you ever reread the books you love?

4. In what ways does Dora connect with some of her favorite authors: i.e., Eudora Welty, Mark Twain, Carson McCullers, Dorothy Parker, Edith Wharton. Others?

5. Certain passages in **Literacy and Longing** pay homage to classic and popular authors in subtle, almost code-like fashion. How many ?codes? can you find and who are the authors?

6. How do Dora and her sister Virginia personify different reactions to their dysfunctional upbringing? How is ?family? depicted? Sometimes we are asked to make sacrifices to help family members. How far would you go to help your relatives, and just how much do we owe the people we love?

7. Comment on L A as a character in the book? Would this novel feel the same if it were set in the Midwest? Manhattan? How do the specific locales enliven the story for readers in and outside of L A?

8. How does meeting Bea change Dora? If you had to name an author who created your mother, who would it be? Wilde? Austen? James? Welty? Or, God forbid, Dickens?

9. Have you ever fallen for the bad boy? What else does Fred offer Dora other than sexy, romantic interludes and poetic discourse? Why would a woman need or want anything more?

10. How does Dora deal with her mother's alcholism and the absence of her father? Does she ever really forgive her mother?

11. Does the character of Darlene serve merely as comic relief? Other than the Shakespearean fool, does she symbolize anything else?

12. How would this story change if it were told in the third person? Would it even work? How much of Dora?s inner voice accounts for reality?

13. Is the book a satire, drama or romantic comedy?

14. How satisfying is the ending? At the end of the novel, is Dora finally content?

Author Bio

Jennifer Kaufman is a former staff writer for the Los Angeles Times and a two time winner of the national Penney-Missouri Journalism Award. She is a graduate of Barnard College and the Columbia University School of Journalism.

Critical Praise

"Chick Lit That Mixes Voltaire With Vogue"

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