ReadingGroupGuides
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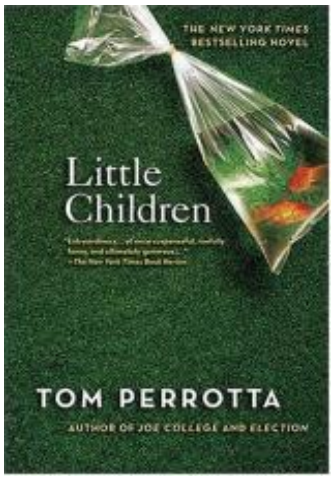
Little Children

by Tom Perrotta



About the Book

Tom Perrotta's thirty-ish parents of young children are a varied and surprising bunch. There's Todd, the handsome stay-at-home dad dubbed "The Prom King" by the moms of the playground; Sarah, a lapsed feminist with a bisexual past, who seems to have stumbled into a traditional marriage; Richard, Sarah's husband, who has found himself more and more involved with a fantasy life on the internet than with the flesh and blood in his own house; and Mary Ann, who thinks she has it all figured out, down to scheduling a weekly roll in the hay with her husband, every Tuesday at 9pm. They all raise their kids in the kind of sleepy American suburb where nothing ever seems to happen-at least until one eventful summer, when a convicted child molester moves back to town, and two restless parents begin an affair that goes further than either of them could have imagined. Unexpectedly suspenseful, but written with all the fluency and dark humor of Perrotta's previous novels, **Little Children** exposes the adult dramas unfolding amidst the swingsets and slides of an ordinary American playground.

Discussion Guide

1. Is **Little Children** an appropriate or deceptive title for this novel? Can you think of the different ways the phrase is employed within the book? To what characters does it best apply? In the end, is the title simply descriptive, or does it work on multiple levels?

2. Which characters do you sympathize most with in the novel, and why? Which characters are the least sympathetic? Do your sympathies shift over course of the novel?

3. What does Todd want from Sarah? What does Sarah want from Todd? Are they in love, or simply using each other to escape from bad marriages and/or unhappy lives?

4. Very few criminals in our culture are more vilified than pedophiles. What do you make of the portrayal of Ronnie

McGorvey? Is he a uniquely evil character in the novel? Or is he more similar to some of the other characters than they'd like to admit? Is he treated fairly by the people in the town?

5. Is Larry justified in his obsession with Ronnie? Are his methods simply unorthodox, or he is a bully who's lost his moral compass? In the end, does he do more harm than good?

6. How are children portrayed in this novel? What do you make of such details as Aaron's jester's hat, Big Bear, and the games Train Wreck and Car Doctor? Do Todd and Sarah have different attitudes toward their children, and toward themselves as parents?

7. What role does sports play in the novel? Why is Todd so fascinated with the skateboarders? What need does the football team address in his life?

8. When Sarah and Mary Ann argue about *Madame Bovary* at the book group, what are they really arguing about? Which one makes the most convincing argument about Emma Bovary, and by extension, about the characters in *Little Children*?

9. How do the characters' pasts influence their behaviors within the novel? Who is trying to escape the past? Who is trying to relive it? Who is simply repeating it?

10. A critic has suggested that "all the noncriminal [characters] in this story are better off in the end than they were at the start." Is this true? Can you think of any exceptions?

11. Critics have differed a great deal in characterizing the tone of the novel. One called it a "gentle satire," while another claimed that "Perrotta has moved into the suburbs with a wrecking ball." Which critic do you agree with? How do you account for this discrepancy in these descriptions?

Author Bio

Tom Perrotta is the author of 11 works of fiction, including ELECTION and LITTLE CHILDREN, both of which were made into Oscar-nominated films, and THE LEFTOVERS and MRS. FLETCHER, which were adapted into acclaimed HBO series. His new novel is GHOST TOWN.

Critical Praise

"darkly comic, with a mischievous eye for absurd and intimate detail?a virtuoso set."

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