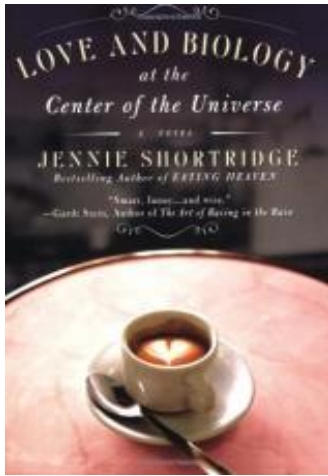


Love and Biology at the Center of the Universe

by Jennie Shortridge



About the Book

Upon learning that her college sweetheart husband has been seeing another woman, Mira Serafino's once perfect world is shattered and she wants no one, least of all her big Italian family, to know. She takes off --- with no destination and little money --- heading north until her car breaks down in Seattle. There she takes a job at the offbeat Coffee Shop at the Center of the Universe, where she'll experience a terrifying but invigorating freedom, and meet someone she'll come to love: the new Mira.

Discussion Guide

1. Main character Mira Serafino enjoys being part of her big Italian famiglia. In what ways does her extended family help and support her, and in what ways do they perhaps keep her from becoming her true self?
2. Mira struggles with the duality of her nature. On one hand, she seems driven to be the perfect woman: a good wife, mother, daughter, and career woman. On the other hand, she wrestles with secret desires and unsettling feelings. Do most women in our society face this dilemma?
3. How does Mira's family history and the early loss of her mother affect who she becomes as an adult and her relationships with her family members, husband, and daughter?
4. Four generations of women are depicted in this story. How does each?the grandmother, the mother, Mira, and her daughter, Thea?impact and influence the other? What does Nonna pass down through the generations, and how do each of the younger generations either accept or refuse it?

5. Why does Mira run away from home? Do you think she's justified, or are her actions irrational and irresponsible? Do you think she should have stayed and tried to work it out with her husband, Parker?
6. Mira makes a new life in Seattle at the Coffee Shop at the Center of the Universe. Why do you think she chooses this? Is it really only because it's where her car breaks down, or is it because, as she says, "she landed in this Oz, like Dorothy, for a reason"?
7. Why is Thea angry with Mira? Is it simple mother/daughter separation, or are there deeper reasons behind it?
8. Betrayal and abandonment are central issues in this story. How many characters feel they are betrayed or abandoned, and in what ways?
9. The story starts in a small town on the idyllic coast of Oregon and ends up in the noisy hubbub of an urban neighborhood in Seattle. How does this relate to Mira's personal journey as well as physical?
10. What does Mira learn from her male relationships at the coffee shop? From Gus? Doug? Martin? Others?
11. How has Mira changed by the end of the story? Why does she make the final decision she does?

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.

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