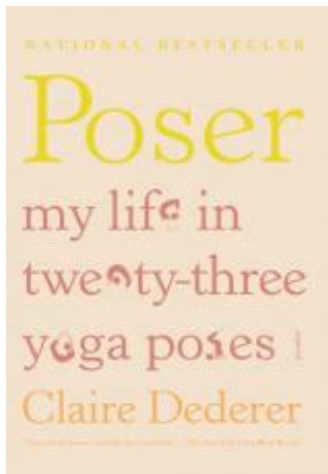


Poser: My Life in Twenty-three Yoga Poses

by Claire Dederer



About the Book

Claire Dederer wasn't looking for enlightenment when she decided to try yoga; she just wanted to heal her aching back. As a time-crunched new mom, she didn't even want a live instructor, opting for videotapes that made her back ache even more. Eventually, she found a class led by a man with a Vincent Price voice and a gentle, encouraging demeanor. That was more than a decade ago, and the transformation she has experienced as a yoga student continues to affect all aspects of her life. By turns wry and wise, *Poser* captures Claire's unique journey to self-acceptance.

As she progresses through increasingly challenging poses, she taps a well of emotions, ranging from fear to exhilaration. She struggles to be patient in the face of constantly awkward turns, gradually dissolving the perfectionism that marks so many women in her Seattle community. A child of the 1960s and '70s, she had watched her free-spirited mother navigate an unconventional marriage. Raising children of her own, Claire is determined to provide more stability, even as she and her husband eke out an unstable income as writers. But on the yoga mat, the reality of "stability" takes on new meaning, helping her gradually come to terms with uncertainty and simply savor the experience of life.

"The longer I do yoga, the worse I get at it. I can't tell you what a relief it is," Claire writes. A book that brims with truth --- from the tragicomic to the transcendent --- **Poser** is one that you will want to share. The questions and discussion topics that follow are designed to enrich your reading group's experience of this illuminating memoir.

Discussion Guide

1. Claire's first challenge is to find the right instructor. What qualities would your yoga instructor need to possess? How do Claire's expectations compare to those of other students she meets along the way?

2. What is at the heart of the perfectionism Claire sees in her circle of Seattle friends? At what point does wanting "the best" for a child become excessive and unhealthy?
3. What did Claire's parents teach her about being a parent and a spouse? How was she both liberated and hindered by their unconventional marriage?
4. How do Claire and Bruce shape each other over the course of the book? As they cope with his depression and celebrate triumphs in his career, how does her role in his life evolve?
5. The chapter titles reflect the fluctuations as much as the progression of Claire's life. Which of these poses --- ranging from Camel to Downward Dog --- could capture turning points in your life as well?
6. Discuss the book's title as it is reflected in the book's studio scenes. What does Claire discover about her true self as she struggles, concentrates, and adapts in class? What "impersonations" does she shed?
7. How does Claire and Bruce's concept of money change throughout the book? How is their marriage affected by the fact that they are in the same profession? As writers, do they have a different outlook on livelihood and providing for each other?
8. Claire writes vividly of her childhood with her brother. What are the greatest differences and similarities between them? What memories will Lucy and Willie have of their childhood?
9. What does *Poser* tell us about the cultural changes that have influenced women's lives in America since the early 1970s? How do Claire's needs and expectations compare to her mother's? How does the enormous popularity of yoga reflect these cultural changes?
10. Chapter 10, "Scale," concludes with Claire's observation that "the yoga taught in the sutras was different from the yoga that was taught in *The Pradipika*, which was different from the yoga that I was taught in the studio. But I was a magpie, a bricoleur, a pragmatist: I would take what I needed, and logic be hanged." What surprised you the most as you read about the sometimes contradictory history of yoga? Which approach to yoga seems the most appealing to you?
11. In chapter 28, "Splits," Claire writes, "Boulder was a tonic, a place where your path (in all its meanings) could be the most important thing in your life, and you could be surrounded by other people on their very special paths." What do Claire and Bruce discover about their paths when they move their family to Boulder? How do the landscape, the community, and other factors capture the significant changes that occur during this chapter in their lives? Which locales have had the greatest effect on your path?
12. How does Claire's sense of self change after her parents' divorce? Why do you think they remained married for so many years?
13. What gives Claire the wisdom to make her home on the island where, in 1973, her concept of home had been shaken? What makes an island the appropriate setting for the closing passages in the book?
14. What makes **Poser** different from other books on yoga you have read? How does it buck the trend of self-help guides

and memoirs?

Author Bio

Claire Dederer is the author of *MONSTERS, LOVE AND TROUBLE* and the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *POSER: My Life in Twenty-Three Yoga Poses*, which has been translated into 12 languages. A book critic, essayist and reporter, Dederer is a longtime contributor to *The New York Times* and has also written for *The Atlantic*, *Vogue*, *Slate*, *The Nation* and *New York* magazine. She lives near Seattle with her family.

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