ReadingGroupGuides
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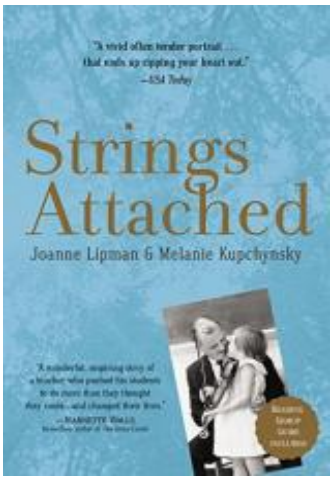
Strings Attached

by Joanne Lipman and Melanie Kupchynsky



About the Book

STRINGS ATTACHED is a powerful memoir about resilience in the face of unspeakable tragedy, an inspiring and poignant tale of how one man transformed his own heartache into a legacy of joy for his students.

His students knew Jerry Kupchynsky as "Mr. K" --- the fierce Ukrainian-born music teacher who rehearsed them until their fingers almost bled and who made them better than they ever expected to be. Away from the classroom, though, life seemed to conspire against him at every turn. STRINGS ATTACHED takes you on his remarkable journey, from his childhood on the run in Nazi Germany, to his life in America caring for his disabled wife while raising their two small daughters, to his search for his beloved younger daughter after she mysteriously disappeared --- a search that would last for seven years.

His unforgettable story is lyrically told in alternating chapters by two childhood friends who reconnected decades later: Melanie Kupchynsky, his daughter, and Joanne Lipman, a former student. Heartbreaking yet ultimately triumphant, STRINGS ATTACHED is a testament to the astonishing power of hope --- and a celebration of the profound impact one person can have on the lives of others.

Discussion Guide

1. Did you ever study a musical instrument? What was the experience like?

2. What role does music play in your daily life?

3. Who were important teachers for you? What made them valuable?

4. What do you think about Mr. K.?s teaching methods? Can harshness be excused by passion?

5. Throughout his life Mr. K strongly emphasized the importance of discipline. Why was it so important to him? What are possible dangers to such discipline?

6. Where to you exhibit discipline in your life? Where did you learn this?

7. What part of general education should music instruction play? Why?

8. What were your thoughts and feeling about Mr. K. early in the story? In what ways, if any, does this change as you learn about his traumatic past?

9. Thinking about Melanie, what are the benefits and risks of rigorous training for very young children? Does the presence of aptitude or even genius alter what seems appropriate?

10. How are the two narrative voices, those of Joanne and Melanie, different? What does each bring to the storytelling?

11. What effects result from having two narrators telling of similar subjects from different points of view?

12. Discuss Joanne?s statement to Mr. K. about why she wouldn?t pursue music professionally: ?I love music. That?s why I could never do it for a living.? (198)

13. Listen to ?Meditation? from *Thais* by Massenet. This was Mr. K.?s favorite piece of music, one he had Melanie play at her mother?s funeral, her sister?s memorial, and for him when in the hospital. What does the piece suggest or reveal about him?

Author Bio

Joanne Lipman is one of the nation?s most prominent journalists and commentators. She founded and was Editor-in-Chief of the National Magazine Award-winning Condé Nast *Portfolio*, and was deputy managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, where she supervised coverage that earned three Pulitzer Prizes. She advises news and media organizations such as CNN, Yahoo! and New York Public Radio, and she has appeared as a commentator on CNN, CBS and NBC among others. Her work has also appeared in publications including *The New York Times, Time* and *Newsweek.* She and her family live in New York City.

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Critical Praise

?A wonderful, inspiring story of a teacher who pushed his students to do more than they thought they could --- and changed their lives.?

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