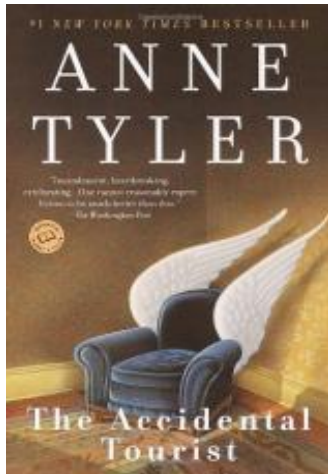


The Accidental Tourist

by Anne Tyler



About the Book

Macon Leary is a travel writer who hates both travel and anything out of the ordinary. He is grounded by loneliness and an unwillingness to compromise his creature comforts when he meets Muriel, a deliciously peculiar dog-obedience trainer who up ends Macon's insular world-and thrusts him headlong into a remarkable engagement with life.

Discussion Guide

1. Would you characterize yourself as an accidental tourist in your own life? Do you know anyone you might consider an accidental tourist?
2. What kind of traveler are you? Would you find Macon's guides helpful?
3. Macon has come up with a technique to avoid contact with others on airplanes. Public transportation can lead to an awkward intimacy with strangers. How do you handle such situations? Does Macon's approach work for you?
4. There was no memorial service for Ethan in Baltimore. Whose idea do you think that was? Do you agree with Garner, Macon's neighbor, who chastises him for not having one?
5. Macon's style of mourning offends many people, including his wife. Do their complaints have any merit?
6. According to Macon, "it was their immunity to time that made the dead so heartbreaking." Discuss the meaning of this statement.
7. What is the significance of Macon and Susan's conversation about Ethan? What do they each gain from it?

8. Why doesn't Macon repair his house after it is seriously damaged by water?
9. The loss of a child can be devastating to a marriage. How do you think a relationship survives such a cataclysmic event?
10. Macon believes he became a different person for Sarah. How much do we change in the name of love? How much should we change?
11. Do you think Sarah ever really understood Macon?
12. Macon realizes that while he and Sarah tried too hard to have a child, once they had Ethan, it made their differences that much more glaring. Do you think they would have remained together if Ethan had lived?
13. Macon remarks that "he just didn't want to get involved" with Muriel and her messy life, but somehow he has. Does this ring true? Did Muriel simply overwhelm him?
14. Initially, Macon and Alexander are very wary of each other. Discuss the nature of Macon and Alexander's relationship and what they have to offer each other.
15. Rose decides to love Julian despite her brothers' obvious disapproval. What do you think drives her to make such a difficult decision?
16. Julian describes Rose's retreat back to the Leary house as though she'd worn herself a groove or something in that house of hers, and she couldn't help swerving back into it. Do you think Rose has made a mistake?
17. Do you find yourself as fascinated by the Learys as Julian is? Why or why not?
18. When Rose declares that she and her siblings are the most conventional people she knows, Macon cannot explain why he disagrees with her. Can you?
19. Do you think the Learys' will ever purchase an answering machine? Do you think Julian might slip one in the house?
20. Do you or does anyone you know suffer from geographic dyslexia?
21. Why does Sarah return to Macon? Do you think they could have worked it out or had they used each other up?
22. Macon does not think he has ever taken steps in his life and acted. Do you think this insight is accurate, or is it a product of the helplessness he feels in the wake of his son's death?
23. Do you think Macon has made the right decision in the end? Will the relationship work out?
24. Do you think any of the couples in this novel stand a chance?

25. In the end, Macon comforts himself with the thought that perhaps the dead age, and are part of the flow of time. Does this idea comfort you?

26. If you could learn more about a particular character in this novel, which would it be and why?

27. Would your group recommend this novel to other reading groups? How does this novel compare to other works the group has read?

Author Bio

Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1941 and grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. *CLOCK DANCE* is her 22nd novel; her 11th, *BREATHING LESSONS*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

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Critical Praise

"Anne Tyler [is] covering common ground with uncommon insight. . . . Convincingly real."

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