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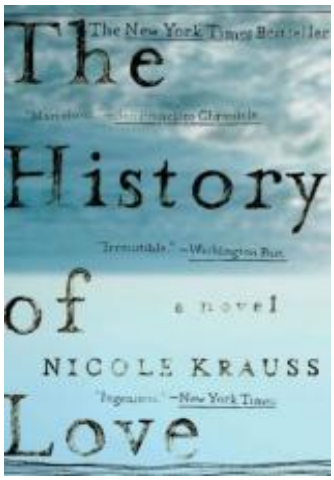
The History of Love

by Nicole Krauss



About the Book

A lost book reappears, drawing together the lives of the irrepressible Leo Gursky who has arrived at the end of his life, a locksmith searching for the son who's never known him, and young Alma Singer, desperate to find her namesake and a cure for her mother's loneliness. Gradually their stories merge into a single triumph of the imagination over loss.

Discussion Guide

1. Leo Gursky and Alma Singer make an unlikely pair, but what they share in common ultimately brings them together. What are the similarities between these two characters?

2. Leo fears becoming invisible. How does fiction writing prove a balm for his anxiety?

3. Explore the theme of authenticity throughout the narrative. Who's real and who's a fraud?

4. Despite his preoccupation with his approaching death, Leo has a spirit that is indefatigably comic. Describe the interplay of tragedy and comedy in **The History of Love**.

5. What distinguishes parental love from romantic love in the novel?

6. Why is it so important to Alma that Bird act normal? How normal is Alma?

7. When Alma meets Leo, she calls him the "oldest man in the world." Does his voice sound so ancient?

8. Uncle Julian tells Alma, "Wittgenstein once wrote that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it." How does this philosophical take on the artistic process relate to the impulse to write in **The History of Love**?

9. Many different narrators contribute to the story of **The History of Love**. What makes each of their voices unique? How does Krauss seam them together to make a coherent novel?

10. Survival requires different tactics in different environments. Aside from Alma's wilderness guidelines, what measures do the characters in the novel adopt to carry on?

11. Most all of the characters in the novel are writers --- from Isaac Moritz to Bird Singer. Alma's mother is somewhat exceptional, as she works as a translator. Yet she is not the only character to transform others' words for her creative practice. What are the similarities and differences between an author and a translator?

12. What are the benefits of friendship in the novel? Why might Alma feel more comfortable remaining Misha's friend rather than becoming his girlfriend?

13. The fame and adulation Isaac Moritz earns for his novels represent the rewards many writers hope for, while Leo, an unwitting ghostwriter, remains unrecognized for his work. What role does validation play in the many acts of writing in **The History of Love**?

14. Leo decides to model nude for an art class in order to leave an imprint of his existence. He writes to preserve the memories of his love for Alma Mereminski. Yet drawings and novels are never faithful renditions of the truth. Do you recognize a process of erasure in the stories he tells us?

15. Why might Krauss have given her novel the title **The History of Love**, the same as that of the fictional book around which her narrative centers?

Author Bio

Nicole Krauss is the author of the novels FOREST DARK, GREAT HOUSE, THE HISTORY OF LOVE and MAN WALKS INTO A ROOM. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, *Harper?s*, *Esquire* and *The Best American Short Stories*, and her books have been translated into more than 35 languages. She is currently the inaugural writer-in-residence at Columbia University?s Mind, Brain and Behavior Institute. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Critical Praise

"A significant novel, genuinely one of the year's best. Emotionally wrenching yet intellectually rigorous, idea-driven but with indelible characters and true suspense."

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