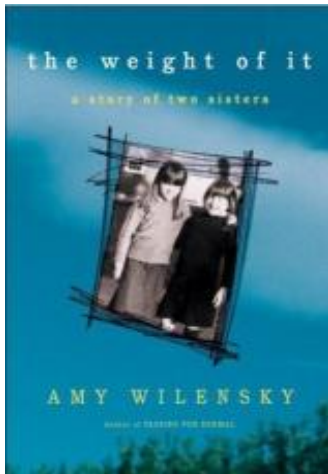


The Weight of It: A Story of Two Sisters

by Amy Wilensky



About the Book

With pathos, perception and remarkable candor, Amy Wilensky looks back at her childhood and the consequences of her sister Alison's metamorphosis from a charming eight-year-old little girl to an obese teenager. This poignant memoir examines the relationship between sisters seen through the experiences they shared, as Amy watched the person she considered her "Irish twin" suffer through a compromised existence for decades. Alison's years of obesity ultimately lead to her transformation through gastric bi-pass surgery to a svelte, attractive woman just like her sister. **The Weight of It** is a revealing portrait of what it is like to be fat in America, a testament not only to the possibilities of modern medicine, but above all, to the unmistakable power of sisterly love.

Discussion Guide

1. Explore the ways in which these two sisters view each other, and each one's own perspective on their shared experiences. Discuss your own experiences of a sibling relationship.
2. Obese people have a certain invisibility in our society, which is ironic considering how exposed they feel. Obesity is a public disease, impossible to conceal, even while those around them tend to ignore what makes them uncomfortable. Discuss the public/private aspects of being fat.
3. Wilensky finds that "the less you think about how other people see you, the more clearly you come to see yourself." How has Alison's persona been formed by this principle?
4. Consequently, Amy learns much about herself through her sister. Observing their parents with their own siblings also provides insight into her relationship with Alison. Discuss these various family dynamics.
5. It is a common belief that birth order has a great influence over personality. For example, the first-born is often more

jealous, anxious and neurotic, the second more playful and assertive. How does this manifest itself in the Wilenskys, and in your own family?

6. Compulsive behavior runs in the Wilensky family-Amy's twitch and Tourette tic, her father's issues with his own weight. Is Alison's obesity an eating disorder beyond her control, an emotional problem that merely took a different form in her sister and in their father?

7. Once the surgery is completed the life of the family continues to revolve around Alison. Is Amy jealous of the attention Alison receives from her mother? Is she envious of her sister's new thinness and the fact that they can wear the same clothes? Discuss the difficulties of growing up in a household that revolves around the demands of one member.

8. Both sisters have trouble accepting the fact that the surgery might actually work. At fifteen, Alison lost fifty pounds at the Diet Center but she didn't stick with it. Was she happier being fat? Did Amy not have faith in medicine, or in Alison's history of failure to control her weight? Is Amy's identity threatened by her sister's transformation?

9. Is surgery actually the easy way out? Are there any moral implications?

10. Amy reflects post-surgery, 'how and why do we become the people we are?' Is it naïve to deny that we reflect what and who society tells us we are?

11. Amy evokes the novels of Lewis Carroll, and the **Alice in Wonderland** tale, in which the older sister's inattention to her younger sibling causes her to fall down the rabbit hole. Discuss the ways in which these novels reflect the experiences of the Wilensky sisters.

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"(Wilensky's) nuanced tale reaches out to encompass the politics of physical appearance, how the dynamics between sisters shape personality and, ultimately, 'how and why...we become the people we are.' ...love and respect is evident on every page."

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