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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Brilliant Life of Eudora Honeysett by Annie Lyons

Summary

Eudora Honeysett is done with this noisy, moronic world—all of it. She has witnessed the indignities and suffering of old age and has lived a full life. At eighty-five, she isn't going to leave things to chance. Her end will be on her terms. With one call to a clinic in Switzerland, a plan is set in motion.

Then she meets ten-year-old Rose Trewidney, a whirling, pint-sized rainbow of color and sparkling cheer. All Eudora wants is to be left alone to set her affairs in order. Instead, she finds herself embarking on a series of adventures with the irrepressible Rose and their affable neighbor, the recently widowed Stanley—afternoon tea, shopping sprees, trips to the beach, birthday celebrations, pizza parties.

While the trio of unlikely BFFs grow closer and anxiously await the arrival of Rose's new baby sister, Eudora is reminded of her own childhood—of losing her father during World War II and the devastating impact it had on her entire family. In reflecting on her past, Eudora realizes she must come to terms with what lies ahead.

But now that her joy for life has been rekindled, how can she possibly say goodbye?

Discussion Questions

1. Eudora and Rose are an unlikely pair. What were some of your favorite moments between them? Have you ever found friendship in unlikely places?
2. How did the alternating timeline affect your understanding of Eudora?
3. What do you think Montgomery the cat symbolizes? How does his story parallel Eudora's?
4. Swimming brings Eudora "a sense of purpose and sufficient impetus to face another day." Do you have any rituals that bring you purpose?
5. Despite Eudora's insistence that she wants to be left alone, why do you think she allows Rose into her life?

6. Eudora repeats a mantra, “My death. My way.” Is it ever possible to have complete control in life?
7. Discuss Eudora and Stella’s relationship and how it evolved over the course of the novel. Do you think their love was unconditional, despite their fraught history?
8. Think about Stanley and Eudora’s different perspectives about their situations. How did their paths in life bring them to have those views? In what ways are they similar?
9. Do you think Beatrice Honeysett was a good mother? Do you blame her for any of the events in the novel?
10. Did you find yourself siding with Petra or Eudora more during their conversations? Do you think either one was entirely right in their views, or are there merits to both their stances?
11. How does growing older change us, and what never changes about us? Has this novel made you think about what is most important to hold onto as we move through life?
12. Think about the men in Eudora’s life. How did they treat her? Do you think Eddie or Stella is to blame?
13. Rose says, “I think talking about the stuff that scares you is very important.” What do you think Eudora is afraid of?
14. Petra tells Eudora that it’s important to live life to the fullest while we can. What does it mean to live your fullest life?
15. Where is the line between hiding our pain and moving on? How do the characters in the book handle their grief differently? How do you tend to cope with sadness?
16. Is it ever too late to find forgiveness? Is it possible to have a new beginning, or do we always carry our pasts with us?
17. When Rose asks why life can be so sad, Eudora replies, “Perhaps it’s the universe’s way of making you appreciate the happier times.” Do you think this is true?
18. What are the similarities and differences in the way that Eudora and Rose view the concept of death? What is your idea of a ‘good’ death?
19. How do you interpret the novel’s ending? Do you think it is a happy ending for any of the characters?