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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **Glitter and Glue: A Memoir** by Kelly Corrigan

#### Summary

When Kelly Corrigan was in high school, her mother neatly summarized the family dynamic as “Your father’s the glitter but I’m the glue.” This meant nothing to Kelly, who left childhood sure that her mom—with her inviolable commandments and proud stoicism—would be nothing more than background chatter for the rest of Kelly’s life, which she was carefully orienting toward adventure. After college, armed with a backpack, her personal mission statement, and a wad of traveler’s checks, she took off for Australia to see things and do things and Become Interesting.

But it didn’t turn out the way she pictured it. In a matter of months, her savings shot, she had a choice: get a job or go home. That’s how Kelly met John Tanner, a newly widowed father of two looking for a live-in nanny. They chatted for an hour, discussed timing and pay, and a week later, Kelly moved in. And there, in that house in a suburb north of Sydney, 10,000 miles from the house where she was raised, her mother’s voice was suddenly everywhere, nudging and advising, cautioning and directing, escorting her through a terrain as foreign as any she had ever trekked. Every day she spent with the Tanner kids was a day spent reconsidering her relationship with her mother, turning it over in her hands like a shell, straining to hear whatever messages might be trapped in its spiral.

This is a book about the difference between travel and life experience, stepping out and stepping up, fathers and mothers. But mostly it’s about who you admire and why, and how that changes over time.

#### Discussion Questions

1. As a young woman Kelly thinks, “Things happens when you leave the house,” and books a round-the-world trip to Australia. Do you think that these types of adventures are necessary to gain life experience? Does Kelly’s maxim change by the end of the book?
2. Milly and Martin respond differently to Kelly’s entry into their lives. Why do you think this is? When (if ever) do things begin to change with Milly?
3. Like the characters in the book *My Ántonia*, Kelly wants to be someone important to Evan. What does she mean by that? Based on what Kelly reveals about Evan at the end of her story, do you think she was successful? Why or why not?

4. During her time in Australia, Kelly realizes that it's only when she's away from her mother that she can appreciate her forthright, often unyielding nature and the role she played in Kelly's childhood. Have you come to see anything more clearly about your own mother over time?
5. Kelly often hears her mother's voice in her head, offering advice and reciting her maxims as she tries to care for Milly and Martin. Has something similar ever happened to you? Does your mother have rules to live by?
6. What is the significance of Walker the American? How does he influence Kelly's understanding of life experience?
7. Do you think daughters' relationships with their fathers are inherently different from their relationships with their -mothers? Does Kelly's relationship with Greenie support this? What does the fact that Mary kept Kelly's shoplifting a secret from her father suggest?
8. John Tanner is working hard and quietly to raise his kids when Kelly arrives. How does he change over the course of the book? How would you have tried to help him adjust to his new circumstances?
9. When Kelly works at her mom's real estate agency, she is shocked to hear co-workers describe her mother as "the life of the office" (page 87). Why is this an important moment for Kelly? How is your perception of your own mother different from her friends' and colleagues' perceptions?
10. On page 146, Kelly explains the phenomenon called "Reader Response." Did you find yourself interpreting *Glitter and Glue* through the lens of your own personal experiences? Is it possible to read any book without automatically subconsciously comparing it to your own life?
11. Kelly remembers many vivid moments from her stay with the Tanners, including her trip to the beach and Martin's tantrum walking home from school. Why do you think Kelly still thinks about the Tanners? Why do you think she chose to write this story after her cancer scare?
12. Of all the ideas juxtaposed in these pages—mothers and fathers, adventure and life experience, stepping out and stepping up—which resonate the most with you? Why?
13. On page 47, we learn where the title *Glitter and Glue* comes from. What do you think of having one parent as the glitter and another as the glue? Is this what it was like in your own family? Was this always the case?
14. Kelly often says that, for her, *Glitter and Glue* is fundamentally about acceptance, which she calls "the Mt. Everest of emotions. . . hard to get there, hard to stay there." She defines acceptance as the moment you "actually stop trying to change someone, not because you've given up but because you finally realize that their way of being in the world is the right way for them." Have you experienced this level of acceptance, either as the person accepted or the person accepting?

15. Kelly also talks about the difference between like and love, something she learned through her relationship with her mom. She says she “used to think love was just a whole lot of like but now she sees that you can like people you might never be able to love and you can love people deeply that you don’t particularly like.” Do you have any relationships that fall into either of these categories?

Summary from Goodreads.com  
Discussion Questions from Penguin Random House