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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

The Noel Diary by Richard Paul Evans

Summary

Bestselling romance author Jacob Churcher hasn't been home for almost twenty years — not since his mentally ill mother kicked him out of the house when he was just sixteen. When a lawyer calls, days before Christmas, to inform him that his estranged mother has passed away and left her house to him, Jacob returns not just to settle the estate but to try and reconcile with the past and the pain and abuse he experienced as a child. Also, maybe cleaning out her house will be slightly less depressing than spending the holidays alone, watching re-runs of Christmas classics.

But as it turns out, the house holds more than just difficult memories, Jacob's mother had become a hoarder and he must excavate through two decades worth of clutter. As Jacob digs through the detritus, like an archaeologist, he uncovers many puzzling items including a diary left by someone named Noel, a young woman he has no recollection of, who stayed with Jacob's family during her pregnancy. That's not the only echo from the past. Jacob has an unexpected visitor, Rachel, a woman looking for the mother who put her up for adoption thirty years before. United by their quest to make sense of the past and rewrite their futures, Jacob and Rachel begin a search for Noel. Along the way they find more than they possibly imagined, including grace, forgiveness and a chance at love.

Discussion Questions

1. **Opening the Past:** Jake finds himself sorting through his mother's house and, in turn, his memories. What did you think of the way the book handles grief and emotional inheritance? Did it resonate with any personal experiences?
2. **The Power of Journals:** The discovery of the Noel diary changes everything for Jake and Rachel. Have you ever found (or kept) an old diary or letter that gave you a new perspective on someone's life?
3. **Family and Forgiveness:** Forgiveness plays a big role in the story -- for both Jake and Rachel. Did you find their paths to forgiveness believable? Why or why not?
4. **Jake's Fame vs. His Solitude:** As a successful author, Jake lives a very different life from what his childhood predicted. How do you think fame and success have shaped his relationships and self-perception?

5. The Mother Figures: Jake's mother and Noel (Rachel's birth mother) are both flawed but important characters. How did your feelings about them change throughout the story?
6. Holiday Atmosphere: Did reading this book in December enhance your experience? How did the Christmas setting influence the emotional tone of the novel?
7. Rachel's Search: Rachel is trying to connect with the woman who gave her up. What did you think of her motivations? Would you have made the same decisions she did?
8. Second Chances: Jake and Rachel each get a second chance at understanding their roots -- and at love. Do you believe in the idea that it's never too late for healing?
9. Romance in Grief: Some readers find the love story beautiful; others find it rushed or convenient. What's your take?
10. Movie Tie-In: If anyone in your group has watched the Netflix adaptation -- how did it compare to the book? Did any changes work better or worse?
11. A Quote to Remember: Was there a line or passage that stuck with you? Why?
12. Your Own Noel Diary: If you kept a Noel diary -- a record of meaningful holiday moments or memories -- what would be on the first page?

Summary from the GoodReads.com.
Discussion Questions created by ChatGPT.