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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Rules For Visiting by Jessica Francis Kane

Summary

A beautifully observed and deeply funny novel of May Attaway, a university gardener who sets out on an odyssey to reconnect with four old friends over the course of a year.

At forty, May Attaway is more at home with plants than people. Over the years, she's turned inward, finding pleasure in language, her work as a gardener, and keeping her neighbors at arm's length while keenly observing them. But when she is unexpectedly granted some leave from her job, May is inspired to reconnect with four once close friends. She knows they will never have a proper reunion, so she goes, one-by-one, to each of them. A student of the classics, May considers her journey a female Odyssey. What might the world have had if, instead of waiting, Penelope had set out on an adventure of her own?

RULES FOR VISITING is a woman's exploration of friendship in the digital age. Deeply alert to the nobility and the ridiculousness of ordinary people, May savors the pleasures along the way--afternoon ice cream with a long-lost friend, surprise postcards from an unexpected crush, and a moving encounter with ancient beauty. Though she gets a taste of viral online fame, May chooses to bypass her friends' perfectly cultivated online lives to instead meet them in their messy analog ones.

Ultimately, May learns that a best friend is someone who knows your story--and she inspires us all to master the art of visiting.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you believe in the concept of a best friend? If so, why? If not, when did that notion lose its meaning for you?
2. May taps into her truest self through gardening, nurturing the care that she brings on her visits. What is the hobby or calling where you find that quality in yourself? Do we attribute enough value to the things that make us into better people?
3. Social media plays an important role in the novel—Amber's story gives May the inspiration for her journey, Lindy filters her life through Facebook and Instagram, and #fortnightfriends goes viral. How have digital platforms had an impact on your friendships?

4. From the Virginia Woolf epigram to Emerson's *Happy is the house that shelters a friend*, the book draws inspiration from centuries of writing on friendship and visiting. Are there aphorisms or essays dear to you on these topics?
5. Which of the novel's characters did you most closely identify with? If you were to choose the life of May, Lindy, Vanessa, Neera, or Rose for yourself, which would you pick?
6. In her visits, we see how much May brings into the lives of her friends and how the time she spends with them invigorates her, too. With her mother, however, May must confront the limits of what one person can do for another. Have you had to face this truth in your life? How have you responded?
7. Rose describes May as "[p]rickly, but in a soft, long-needed way." By one definition, the thrill of true friendship is having someone who sees the virtue in your unevenness. How do your friends describe you? What does it take to see past your defenses?
8. May rails against the death of just "showing up." Yet with Leo, the absence of physical proximity makes space for a new kind of intimacy. Why do you think this is? To what extent does the novel believe that absence makes the heart grow fonder?
9. Think of someone that you want to visit. Will you do it? Why or why not?
10. May very helpfully offers her ten rules for visiting. Is there one that you would add? Any that you have quibbles with?

Summary from GoodReads.com
Discussion Questions from Penguin.com