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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Then She Was Gone by Lisa Jewell

Summary

Ellie Mack was the perfect daughter. She was fifteen, the youngest of three. She was beloved by her parents, friends, and teachers. She and her boyfriend made a teenaged golden couple. She was days away from an idyllic post-exams summer vacation, with her whole life ahead of her.

And then she was gone.

Now, her mother Laurel Mack is trying to put her life back together. It's been ten years since her daughter disappeared, seven years since her marriage ended, and only months since the last clue in Ellie's case was unearthed. So when she meets an unexpectedly charming man in a café, no one is more surprised than Laurel at how quickly their flirtation develops into something deeper. Before she knows it, she's meeting Floyd's daughters—and his youngest, Poppy, takes Laurel's breath away.

Because looking at Poppy is like looking at Ellie. And now, the unanswered questions she's tried so hard to put to rest begin to haunt Laurel anew. Where did Ellie go? Did she really run away from home, as the police have long suspected, or was there a more sinister reason for her disappearance? Who is Floyd, really? And why does his daughter remind Laurel so viscerally of her own missing girl.

Discussion Questions

1. *Then She Was Gone* is, first and foremost, a mystery. Yet many questions are answered quite early on in the book. How soon did you guess what really happened to Ellie, and if you did, did it affect your enjoyment of the book?
2. In the prologue, it says "Looking at it backward it was obvious all along." Now that you've finished the novel, do you agree? What "warning signs" referred to in the prologue might Ellie have spotted if she'd been more aware?
3. Did you think Lisa Jewell's portrayal of Laurel and her journey was realistic? Could you relate to the way she dealt with her grief, or did you find it alienating?

4. What was your impression of Poppy when she is first introduced? Did this change over the course of the book, and if so, how?
5. *Then She Was Gone* is divided into six parts. Why do you think Lisa structured the book this way? How would you categorize each section—what makes it distinct from the other parts of the book?
6. For much of the book, Laurel and her daughter Hanna have a fraught relationship as Laurel fails to let go of unfavorable comparisons between Hanna and Ellie. Do you think it's normal to have a favorite child? How should parents handle these feelings if they arise?
7. Throughout the novel, Laurel has moments in which she feels something is not quite right, but often writes it off as paranoia as a result of losing her daughter. Have you ever written off your own concerns? How can you distinguish between when you are being pessimistic, and when you should trust your intuition?
8. There are four different perspectives shown in the book, but only Noelle and Floyd's narration are in first person. Why do you think Lisa chose to write their chapters in first person, directly addressing other characters, while Laurel and Ellie's chapters were told through third person? What effect did this have on you as you read?
9. Floyd and Noelle are both characters with some obsessive tendencies. What other similarities do they share, and in what ways are they different? Were you able to sympathize with either or both of them?
10. In chapters from Ellie's perspective, she repeatedly brings up the subject of blame, thinking of all the moments that led to what happened to her and what she "should" have done differently, or what others could have done to save her. As you read, did you find yourself blaming characters for the unforeseen consequences of the choices they made? If so, in which situations?
11. At the end of the book, Laurel notes that she "hasn't told Poppy the full truth" (page 351) about everything that happened. Do you think she ever will? How would Poppy react to learning the secrets of her background??

Summary and Discussion Questions from the publisher.