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Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

Age of Miracles by Karen Thompson Walker

Summary

“Maybe everything that happened to me and to my family had nothing at all to do with the slowing. It’s possible, I guess. But I doubt it. I doubt it very much.”

Spellbinding, haunting, *The Age of Miracles* is a beautiful novel of catastrophe and survival, growth and change, the story of Julia and her family as they struggle to live in an extraordinary time. On an ordinary Saturday, Julia awakes to discover that something has happened to the rotation of the earth. The days and nights are growing longer and longer, gravity is affected, the birds, the tides, human behavior and cosmic rhythms are thrown into disarray. In a world of danger and loss, Julia faces surprising developments in herself, and her personal world—divisions widening between her parents, strange behavior by Hannah and other friends, the vulnerability of first love, a sense of isolation, and a rebellious new strength. With crystalline prose and the indelible magic of a born storyteller, Karen Thompson Walker gives us a breathtaking story of people finding ways to go on, in an ever-evolving world.

Discussion Questions

1. As readers, why do you think we’re drawn to stories about the end of the world? What special pleasures do these kinds of narratives offer? And how do you think this element works in *The Age of Miracles*?
2. Julia is an only child. How does this fact affect who she is and how she sees the world? How would her experience of the slowing be different if she had a sibling? How would her experience of middle school be different?
3. How much do you think the slowing alters Julia’s experience of adolescence? If the slowing had never happened, in what ways would her childhood have been different? In what ways would it have been the same?
4. Julia’s parents’ marriage becomes increasingly strained over the course of the book. Why do you think they stay together? Do you think it’s the right choice? How much do you think Julia’s mother does or does not know about Sylvia?

5. Julia's father tells several crucial lies. Discuss these lies and consider which ones, if any, are justified and which ones are not. Is lying ever the right thing to do? If so, when?
6. How would the book change if it were narrated by Julia's mother? What if it were narrated by Julia's father? Or her grandfather?
7. Why do you think Julia is so drawn to Seth? Why do you think he is drawn to her?
8. Did you identify more with the clock-timers or with the real-timers? Which would you be and why?
9. The slowing affects the whole planet, but the book is set in southern California. How does the setting affect the book? How important is it that the story takes place in California?
10. How do you feel about the way the book ends? What do you think lies ahead for Julia, for her parents and for the world?
11. The slowing throws the natural world into disarray. Plants and animals die and there are changes in the weather. Did this book make you think about the threats that face our own natural world? Do you think the book has something to say about climate change?
12. If you woke up tomorrow to the news that the rotation of the earth had significantly slowed, how do you think you would respond? What is the first thing you would do?

Discussion questions supplied by the publisher