



The Names

By Florence Knapp

Random House

An Imprint of Penguin Random House

A Penguin Random House Reading Group Guide

READERS GUIDE

1. According to the author's glossary of names, "Cora" means "the core of the story," and yet Cora is less present in some storylines. Do you think Cora is the heart of the novel—or her son? Whose story feels most central? Or is it some of each? And how do you see the characters relating to the literal meanings of their names?
2. At one point Gordon Jr. observes that though he "can't even explain it to himself . . . he has always wanted to be called Luke." Have you ever wished your name were different? Are there certain names that you feel called to or that you innately dislike?
3. Did you find yourself rooting for one of the boys' storylines over another? Why?
4. Which boy has the better life? And which narrative offers the best life for the other characters? Which storyline feels likeliest?
5. Maia's relationship with her brother is significantly different in each storyline. How do the parental dynamics at play affect the relationship between the siblings?
6. Consider the role of loneliness in the novel. How does isolation complicate Cora's life? Her children's? Conversely, where do instances of friendship and kindness alleviate the family's suffering?



Utah State Library
250 N 1950 W, Ste A
Salt Lake City, UT 84116



801-715-6771



bookbuzz@utah.gov

7. The unnamed vet who helps Cora in Gordon Jr.'s story reappears as Felix in Bear's. Did you spot any other shared elements or characters in the narratives? What did all three stories have in common?
8. In Gordon Jr.'s storyline, Maia suppresses the uncomfortable truth of her mother's abuse. How does the theme of truth play out in each iteration of the story?
9. In Bear's narrative, Cora ends up in a happy relationship with Felix and finds a true friend in Mehri. In Julian's story, he learns not to fear conflict with Orla, and Sílbhe finds Cian; in all stories, Maia makes her way—eventually—to real love. How do these alternative demonstrations of love intersect with the abuse at the core of the novel?
10. Depictions of masculinity are many and varied throughout the novel. How do the story's male characters fall prey to toxic masculinity or become trapped by it? Which characters represent masculinity in a positive way?
11. Bear, Julian, and Gordon Jr. all contend with the fear that they've inherited their father's predisposition toward violence. What do you think we inherit from our families? From our names?



Utah State Library
250 N 1950 W, Ste A
Salt Lake City, UT 84116



801-715-6771



bookbuzz@utah.gov