

Book Club Guide

The Substitute by Nicole Lundrigan

1. The epigraph, from Fernando Pessoa, reads: “I sometimes think that I enjoy suffering. But the truth is I would prefer something else.” This sentiment could apply to numerous characters in the book. Who stands out to you as embodying this quote? How do they do so?
2. The narrative continuously alternates between Warren and the unnamed narrator. What effect did Lundrigan achieve through this switching perspective in terms of the plot? When did this technique work best in building suspense?
3. In terms of character, how does alternating perspectives between Warren and the unnamed narrator create parallels between the two characters? What is the effect of making the two characters similar in this way?
4. In the passages he narrates, does Warren read as a reliable narrator? Does the second narrator read as reliable? Why or why not?
5. When the murderer was revealed, was this a surprising revelation? Looking back, did Lundrigan include hints or clues to the murderer's identity along the way?
6. Giving the murderer a narrative voice allows for a level of closeness between the character and the reader. Did you find yourself relating to the murderer at any points? Did they have any redeeming characteristics?
7. The murderer in *The Substitute* writes in a very elevated, literary style. Were you convinced that the murderer was really a child? Why or why not?
8. Several social topics, such as developmental disabilities, poverty, and mental illness surface throughout the book. What commentary does *The Substitute* make about these social issues?
9. What humour did you find in *The Substitute*? If any, what was its effect?
10. Besides Warren's job as a teacher, how did *The Substitute* work thematically as a title for the novel?