



Reading Guide

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Billy is the character in the novel who most wants to hold still for as long as possible, and this approach certainly meets her need for calm rather than panic. Is this a possible or desirable approach to modern life? Why or why not?
- 2) How do you think the author balances plot and character?
- 3) Whittall provides many great descriptive passages, such as: "the sky was the colour of newly dead skin"; "beige carpeting, the kind that looks like overcooked oatmeal and feels scratchy like patches of old dog hair"; and "I could feel Desperation's presence in the room, hanging around me like a stifling, wet wool sweater." What is your favourite description or moment from the novel?
- 4) Billy says, "Fame makes the whole world seem ridiculous. And stupid people love it." How does this statement apply to her experiences?
- 5) How does Josh deal with the everyday emergencies of his job?
- 6) What are the keys to a healthy relationship? Why is a healthy relationship so elusive for the novel's characters?
- 7) What did you think of the four "Life" vignettes at the beginning of each part of the book? How did they add to the story?
- 8) Amy relates Josh describing "the majority of human beings [as] freeloading dirtbags." Do you think this is how Josh really feels about people? Why or why not? What examples from the novel can you think of that support your opinion?
- 9) Was the accident unexpected to you as a reader? Why or why not?
- 10) Billy describes creativity as "A messy tug-of-war with imagination to erase that feeling that nothing really matters anyway." How well does this describe your own experience of creativity?

11) Josh says, "I knew then . . . that I was going to have to cultivate a firm belief in something. That not believing in anything was going to be more of a hassle, every day of this job, than accepting things as they were in front of me." On the other hand, Billy says that when she passed out from a wasp sting she ceased to exist and so "stopped believing in the afterlife." Why is it important to believe in something in order to make your way through life? What sort of afterlife do you look forward to?