

THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU

Reading Guide

1. Discuss Judd Foxman, the novel's protagonist, from his very ironic and dry sense of humor (shared also by his brothers and sister), to his anger and vulnerability regarding his wife's infidelity, to his conflicted emotions regarding his immediate family. What was your first impression of the protagonist/narrator of this novel? What did you find the most engaging aspect of his character? Did you find any aspect of him off-putting?
2. What was your first impression of Judd's wife, Jen? Because you see her almost entirely from Judd's perspective, was there any chance to see her as a sympathetic character before Judd finds her so? Do you think that Judd and Jen have a chance at salvaging their relationship, with or without a baby girl to raise?
3. Discuss Judd's mother and her relationship with each of her children. Do you think that Hillary Foxman was truly a bad mother? Was there any real irony in her being a child-rearing guru? What was your opinion of her character?
4. One of the largest subjects of the book is parenting. Discuss the various parents in the book (Judd and Jen; Wendy and Barry; Hillary and Mort; Linda) and consider the statement (or statements) that Tropper makes about the responsibilities of a parent to his or her child, and, conversely, the responsibilities of a child to his or her parent.
5. Similarly, what comment is Tropper making about the role of trauma and tragedy in our lives? Almost every character in this book suffers or has suffered: Phillip from his neglected/overindulged childhood; Judd from his wife's infidelity; Horry from his brain damage; Paul from the Rottweiler attack; Wendy from her unhappy marriage; and Alice from her infertility. What does their unhappiness, and the way each person copes with that unhappiness, teach us?

6. Most of the characters in this novel struggle against living up to an ideal established either by themselves or by a friend, family member, or spouse. Judd fails to be the perfect husband, brother, and son; Jen fails to be the perfect wife; Wendy fails to be the perfect mother and Alice fails to become a mother at all. Mort and Hillary Foxman, it turns out, fail their children spectacularly in some ways while succeeding in others. What do the lives of these characters reveal to us about perfectionism, ideals, and our expectations for ourselves and others?

7. Also, compare and contrast the various romantic relationships in this book: who, do you think, had the most admirable or lasting relationship? Who had the most realistic one? Who had the most insurmountable problems? (Is there such a thing as an insurmountable problem, especially looking at problems from Phillip's point of view?)

8. For all of their faults, is the Foxman clan a likeable group of people? What makes them an endearing group of people? Who did you like the most, and who did you find the least appealing, and why? Were there any characters you would have liked to see developed further?

9. Throughout the book Judd has recurring nightmares that often involve a prosthetic limb. Discuss the way these dreams acted as elements of foreshadowing and symbolism throughout the narrative. Consider, too, how they reflected Judd's emotional state as the novel progresses.

10. What did you think of Judd's exit at the end of the shiva? Was his disappearance in Phillip's Porsche realistic? Appropriate? Did you find it a satisfying resolution to the book?

Casting for This Is Where I Leave You, in theaters September 19

Judd Altman played by Jason Bateman

Wendy Altman played by Tina Fey

Hillary Altman played by Jane Fonda

Phillip Altman played by Adam Driver

Paul Altman played by Corey Stoll

Alice Altman played by Kathryn Hahn

Penny Moore played by Rose Byrne

Tracy Sullivan played by Connie Britton