



In the Unlikely Event

By Judy Blume

Vintage

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About This Guide

The questions, discussion topics, and reading list that follow are intended to enhance your reading group's discussion of *In the Unlikely Event*, Judy Blume's gripping new novel about a New Jersey community that is left reeling after a series of tragic plane crashes strikes their town in the early 1950s.

About This Book

"We'll always be connected by that winter."

In 1951, fifteen-year-old Miri Ammerman's life is ruled by routine: academic assignments, extracurricular writing for the school paper, sleepovers with friends, and nightly dinners with her mother, grandmother, and uncle. After a series of freakish plane crashes occur in her hometown of Elizabeth, New Jersey, however, Miri's life is turned upside down. As her community reels from the inexplicable tragedies, an environment of anxiety and suspicion takes hold in Elizabeth. Miri's best friend, Natalie, becomes consumed by the death of one of the victims; meanwhile, her uncle Henry, as a reporter for the local paper, searches for truth among the wreckage. As the crash's impact reverberates in unexpected ways, Miri realizes that life will go on, regardless of whether they have the answers they so desperately desire.

Weaving together the perspectives and experiences of three generations of families, neighbors, and strangers, Judy Blume's *In the Unlikely Event* is a haunting portrait of a community forever bound by tragedy. Rich with sensory details and cultural footnotes, the novel is as much a family saga as it is a time capsule of this complex era of

American history. Based on true events experienced by Blume as a teenager, *In the Unlikely Event* is a landmark work for this esteemed author.

Question & Answer

1. Discuss the environment of Elizabeth, New Jersey, before the crashes occur. How would you describe the community? How does the community band together after the first crash?
2. Throughout *In the Unlikely Event*, newspaper clippings are interspersed among the text. How do those articles help to provide context for the events that occur? How did they aid your understanding of changes in Elizabeth?
3. Class and status play a role throughout *In the Unlikely Event*. How does Miri see herself in the socioeconomic structure of Elizabeth? When does she feel most uncomfortable with her family's position? How does her idea of relative wealth change once she meets Mason?
4. Discuss Miri's relationship with her mother. How would you define the relationship between Miri and Rusty at the beginning of the novel? Are there special pressures on Miri because she is an only child? How do Irene and Henry mitigate the mother-daughter disagreements between Miri and Rusty? Does the relationship change once Miri has her own children? If so, how?
5. *In the Unlikely Event* is arguably a novel about the crashes as much as it is one about Henry Ammerman's development as a journalist. How does Henry's career evolve over the course of the novel? Is he ever conflicted by his role in reporting the tragedy? How has reportage changed since the 1950s?
6. How does Miri's idea of friendship change throughout the novel? Discuss the scene in which Miri visits Natalie in the hospital. How does this incident set the tone for their relationship going forward?
7. Discuss the conspiracy theories that emerge after the crashes. For the teenagers in the novel, how do these rumors act as a means of coping?
8. On page 29, it states that "Miri couldn't help wishing" she had a father like Dr. Osner. What does she desire in a relationship with a father? Discuss her reunion with her biological father. How does this experience change her? Does she ever find someone to fulfill the role of father in her life?
9. Discuss how working women are portrayed in the novel. What challenges do these women face? Can you point to any particular incidents in which the working women—particularly Rusty, Daisy, and Christina—face discrimination or judgment for their roles in the workplace?
10. The crashes create a sense of palpable fear and anxiety for the residents of Elizabeth throughout *In the Unlikely Event*. How does it affect Miri on a psychological level? What about Natalie?
11. Several budding romances play out over the course of *In the Unlikely Event*. What relationship most surprised you? Whom did you root for?
12. How is teen culture described throughout *In the Unlikely Event*? What influence does pop culture have on Miri and her peers? Were you able to trace any similarities between the teens of the 1950s and the teens of today?

13. Discuss the events of the reunion. Did the characters' lives turn out differently from how you would have expected? Who changed the most?

14. Judy Blume has had a prolific career writing books for readers of all ages. How many of her previous novels, if any, have you read? How did your reading experience of *In the Unlikely Event* compare with her other works? Are you able to pinpoint anything in the writing or character development that felt distinctly "Judy Blume" in style or execution?

About This Author

Judy Blume is one of America's most beloved authors. She grew up in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and was a teenager in 1952 when the real events in this book took place. She has written books for all ages. Her twenty-eight previous titles include *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*; *Forever*; and *Summer Sisters*. Her books have sold more than eighty-five million copies in thirty-two languages. She is a champion of intellectual freedom, working with the National Coalition Against Censorship in support of teachers, librarians, and students. In 2004, Blume was awarded the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She lives in Key West and New York City.

Suggested Reading

Where'd You Go, Bernadette by Maria Semple

The Aviator's Wife by Melanie Benjamin

A Spool of Blue Thread by Anne Tyler

Brooklyn by Colm Toibin