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BOOK CLUB NOTES  
HEARTLESS  
TASMA WALTON

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*Heartless* is a moving fable about the power of the human heart, the worthiness of its desires, and the consequences of ignoring them.

Told in seven year increments, *Heartless* is the story of a young girl whose heart is broken by her father leaving her and her mother. We follow the narrator through milestones of coming of age as a teenager, finding love, hiding from the world under a blanket of self-destruction and low self-esteem, and discovering what really matters in life. This is a story about the spiritual and physical aspects of the human heart, and about love, mistakes, and self-belief.

1. A major emotional event for the narrator, at the age of 7, is the discovery of *A strange lady with nearly no clothes on was sitting on our couch. Dad with nearly no clothes on was kissing her.* The narrator is plagued with the question of whether to tell her mother what she has seen. *We should never have said anything,* she writes in her diary.

Discuss the burden of childhood secrets from an adult and child's perspective.

2. *My heart refuses to even look at me. She was a big, loud, red, dancing heart. Now she is shattered, mute, blue, and numb with pain.* This is the moment when the narrator begins to doubt the worthiness of her own heart.

Discuss the impact of events in youth, in particular the sense of abandonment felt by the loss of a father-figure, and how much they impact and influence choices made later in life.

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3. At 14, the narrator visits her father and his new family and holds the nine-month-old baby during the staged family photograph on the cliffs. She is overcome with the innocence of the baby's new, clean heart and experiences an urge to throw the baby to the rocks below.

What events in her life were the catalyst for this reaction?

4. At 21, the narrator finds love with the Beautiful Man, whose heart is perfect and luminous. She vows to never show him her heart. Why?

5. The narrator finally achieves what she has long wanted. To be 'heartless'.

What does it really mean to be heartless? Can broken hearts be mended?

6. At 28, the narrator meets the Rugged Man. His heart matches hers – silent, scarred, hardened.

Discuss the loss of self-worth that is the result of the narrator becoming heartless and the fact that being 'heartless' does not mean that you lose the ability to feel.

7. The narrator is able to mask her inner turmoil and self-destructive tendencies and function in a professional, working capacity.

How common is it to lead a double-life, and hide your personal life from your professional life?

8. At 35, the narrator is told that freedom will come from making a list and fulfilling the twenty things in your life that bring you joy.

What are the twenty things in your life that give you joy? Is there a common element/theme in this list?

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9. The new life and new heart of her Little Baby Girl is untainted.

How possible is it to protect children from the events that will lead to heartbreak and other painful life lessons?

10. At 42, the narrator has a heart attack. Astintina re-emerges and the narrator is faced with the question of whether she can forgive herself for the decisions she has made to get her heart and her life back.

How important is it to forgive ourselves for past actions?

11. At 49, the narrator's father is dying of cancer. She tells him she loves him. What allowed her to say this?

10. The central character is never named. Why do you think the author made this choice?

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