

Reading Group Guide

Dear Reader,

Had I known *Act on the Heart* would strike such a chord with readers, I would have included questions for discussion at the end. I also did not realize how much I would enjoy speaking with readers about writing the book and creating the characters. Many facets of the story lend themselves to group discussion and analysis.

If you would like to schedule me to speak to your group, please click on the Contact tab here on my website, or email me at ggathens@gmail.com.

Happy reading to all!

Genie

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This discussion guide for *Act on the Heart* is intended to expand your book group experience. The suggested questions are to help your members discover new and interesting topics. I hope these ideas will increase your reading enjoyment.

Introduction

At what cost comes love, after happiness and success have been lost to grief and loss? In this powerful novel about courage, a woman abandons her dreams just as they are realized. Why does she retreat into her former life? What solace does she find in the ordinary grace of the world? Can she be tempted out of that life again? Or will a man far outside her boundaries embrace her simplicity?

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the final revelation of Kathryn's love. Had you guessed correctly?
2. Did you notice the time connection of both Kathryn's and Joe's admissions of love?
3. Much of Phoenix's knowledge came from snooping. Which instance provided her most important information? Was there an event that led most directly to her final rampage? Why?
4. In what ways are Joe and Colton transformed by story's end?
5. A number of characters hold secrets that eventually come to light. Was there a certain catharsis once they were able to unload the truth? Did it do them any good?
6. Did Joe control Colton, or vice versa?
7. Was there merit to Joe carrying the burden of Wrenn alone? To his possessiveness?

8. Discuss the title, which comes from the definition of courage. How does the idea of courage resonate throughout the novel? What other admirable qualities did you see in the book's characters, minor and major?
9. Was there a part of the story that was particularly moving to you, that stayed with you the longest?
10. If you had the opportunity to speak to any of the characters at any moment of the story, who would you choose to talk to, what advice would you give and what would you say?
11. If the story were to continue, what do think would happen next to each of the characters? How might their lives be affected?
12. Why does Kathryn leave NY? Do you think she was clinically depressed? Discuss the ways in which she and other characters dealt with their grief.
13. Do you agree with Tommy's insight about quilting being symbolic of Kathryn piecing her life back together? What importance did art and creativity have in her life?
14. Do you think Joe had a responsibility to tell Kathryn about Wrenn? At what point?
15. Do you forgive Colton his duplicitous nature? Does he understand how he pushed Kathryn away?
16. What do you make of Rusty? Do you agree with the way Joe responded to his betrayal?
17. The ending is controversial amongst readers. Were you satisfied with it?
If so, why?
If not, why not?

Enhance your Book Club

1. Tragedy and controversy befall individuals on every level of society. Do you know of an example at varying ends of that scale in your town? Discuss the details, and how/if it changed things for those individuals.
2. Much of Kathryn's perspective comes to us through her nature treks. Make a similar journey in your own neighborhood. What places are ripe for reflection? Where can you go for peace and meditation?
3. List and discuss times when you were called upon to find courage, to act on your heart. How do small moments prepare us to deal with life's bigger struggles?
4. Read a book of your choice, any genre, with an eye toward the courage necessary for characters to achieve their goals. Are you surprised at how often someone acts on their heart instead of things "just happening" to them?