Leave No Trace

By Mindy Mejia

Reading Group Guide

This reading group guide for **Leave No Trace** *includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.*

Introduction

From the author of the "compelling" (*Star Tribune*, Minneapolis) and critically acclaimed *Everything You Want Me to Be*, a riveting and suspenseful thriller about the mysterious disappearance of a boy and his stunning return ten years later.

There is a place in Minnesota with hundreds of miles of glacial lakes and untouched forests called the Boundary Waters. Ten years earlier a man and his son trekked into this wilderness and never returned.

Search teams found their campsite ravaged. They are presumed dead until a decade later, when the son appears. Discovered while ransacking an outfitter store, he is violent and uncommunicative and consequently sent to a psychiatric facility. Maya Stark, the assistant language therapist, is charged with making a connection with their high-profile patient. No matter how she tries, however, he refuses to answer questions about his father or the past ten years of his life.

But Maya, who was abandoned by her own mother, has secrets, too. And as she's drawn closer to this enigmatic boy who is no longer a boy, she'll risk everything to reunite him with his father, who has disappeared from the known world.

Topics & Questions for Discussion

1. *Leave No Trace* is set in present-day Minnesota, both in the wilderness of the Boundary Waters and its more urban landscapes. What details does Mejia use to create atmosphere and build the setting? How does place affect the action of the story?

2. What was your first impression of Maya? Did your feelings toward her change throughout the novel? What did you think of her when she confessed to killing Derek?

3. Family relationships are at the heart of *Leave No Trace*; compare and contrast the parent-child relationships in the novel. What themes does Mejia explore within these relationships?

4. The geography of the Boundary Waters is integral to *Leave No Trace*. Note the way Mejia balances the beauty and danger of this remote location in her descriptions. What passages do you find most emphasize the unique place?

5. The other "disappeared" people Mejia mentions in the story, such as Ho Van Thanh, Agafia Lykov, and Christopher Knight, are all real people. Pick one or two and research their stories. Which disappearance most intrigues you? What do you think captures the imagination about people living away from society?

6. What role does the Bannockburn shipwreck play in the novel? How does its story parallel the stories of characters in *Leave No Trace*?

7. At the end of the novel, Mejia writes, "There are some places, though, we can only go alone." Think about the spaces (physical, mental, emotional) that Mejia's characters experience by themselves. Are there any common factors?

8. As you read along, what did you think happened to Josiah, Lucas, Heather, and Jane? How did it differ from what is revealed at the end of the novel?

9. Extreme circumstances and intertwined history aside, what do you think attracts Maya and Lucas to each other? What similar personality traits do you see in these two characters?

10. "I was the girl who didn't need anyone and made sure things stayed that way. . . . My life was lonely, but there was something vital in the loneliness, an imperative that I keep the space around me empty and weightless," Maya thinks to herself after Lucas comes to her home and begins to break down her emotional barriers. How does Mejia draw the distinction between solitude and loneliness? Who in the novel would you deem lonely and who lives in solitude? How do their situations change during the course of the novel?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. For your next book group pick, read Mindy's previous novel, *Everything You Want Me to Be*, and compare and contrast the main characters. What themes occur in the lives of these characters? What seems to interest Mindy about her characters in both books?

2. Read another book set in Minnesota, such as a novel by William Kent Krueger, and discuss the ways the authors address setting and Midwestern culture. How do both portray the landscape and the people who live there?

3. Learn more about Mindy Mejia on her website: https://mindymejia.com/