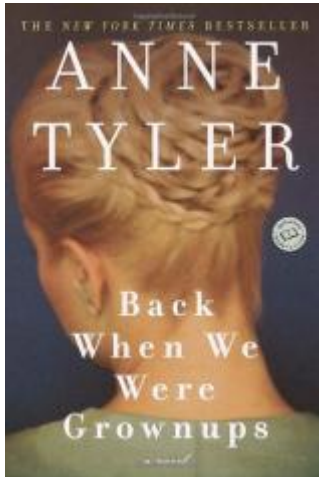


Back When We Were Grownups

by Anne Tyler



About the Book

After presiding over a disastrous family picnic in Baltimore, fifty-three-year-old Rebecca Davitch suddenly begins to question who she is...and how she has turned into someone other than herself. The story of how she answers this question is beguiling, funny, and deeply moving.

Discussion Guide

1. "How on earth did I get like this?" wonders Rebecca at the start of the novel about the person she has become. Have you ever had a moment like this? Did you end up with the life you thought you would have?
2. While many people thing longingly of the road not traveled, Rebecca decides to take it. Is this a good idea? If you were going to do so, what steps would you have to take?
3. Do you think that Rebecca would have stayed with Will if she had not met Joe?
4. Rebecca suggests to NoNo that "all of us love people at least partly for their usefulness." Do you agree?
5. Do you think Min Foo is going to discard Hakim as she has her other husbands?
6. Rebecca reflects that marriage leads to "knowing more than you should about the other person." Do you agree?
7. Tina's visit leads Rebecca to observe her life from the uncom fortable perspective of an outsider. Have you ever had that experience with a guest?
8. Rebecca describes Tina, Joe's first wife, as "the distant, alluring mystery woman whose edges had not been worn dull by the constant minor abrasions of daily contact." What has Tina gained and lost because of the distance she has placed between herself and her daughters?
9. Rebecca watches NoNo change as she takes on parenthood. Dis cuss how becoming a parent changes people and how it does not.
10. Rebecca and NoNo decide to take on instant parenthood. What are the challenges and rewards of choosing such a path?

11. Rebecca wants to believe that there are grander motivations in history than family and friends, but concludes that there are not. Do you agree?
12. This novel explores the selective and faulty nature of memory. How accurate do you think your own memories are? What do you remember and what don't you remember?
13. Is the conditional and faulty nature of human memory a blessing or a curse?
14. Will reminds Rebecca that she wanted a big family with all of its rituals, a fact Rebecca had forgotten about the girl she once was. How could Rebecca have forgotten such an important piece of information about herself?
15. Why is Will so determined to see Rebecca as she is not?
16. How do you think Poppy's memory of Rebecca's first birthday party at Open Arms would compare with Rebecca's?
17. Zeb never married. Do you think he has been waiting for Rebecca all these years? What do you think will happen with Rebecca and Zeb? Who will have to make the first move if this relationship is ever to get off the ground?
18. Does Rebecca's family see her as a three-dimensional person by the end of this novel?
19. How do you think each of Rebecca's daughters would describe her?
20. Which is your favorite character in this novel and why?
21. If you could ask the author one question about this novel, what would you ask?
22. Why did your group choose this novel? Are you happy with your choice? What book is up next?

Author Bio

Anne Tyler was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1941 and grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. VINEGAR GIRL is her 21st novel; her 11th, BREATHING LESSONS, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1988. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

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Critical Praise

"One does not so much read a Tyler novel as visit it. Her ability to conduct several conversations at once while getting the food to the table turns the act of reading into a kind of transport ... In a literary landscape that too often mistakes sarcasm for humor and self-reference for irony, an Anne Tyler novel, brimming with the real thing, calls for a toast."

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