

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MARIA SEMPLE



AUTHOR OF WHERE'D YOU GO, BERNADETTE

A NOVEL

GO GENTLE

PUTNAM

- 1.** When Adora hits her lowest point, Stoicism feels “obvious and reasonable.” How much did you read her philosophical turn as a genuine intellectual awakening or as a trauma response? What “hole” in her life does Stoicism seem to fill?
- 2.** Between Adora’s lectures, books and billionaire clients, she is practically the face of Stoicism. How does being a public philosopher shape what she can admit to herself privately? Where do you see the gap between the woman on stage or in the classroom and the one at home, and how does the novel play with that double life?
- 3.** Adora insists that externals cannot be the basis of a good and truly content life. Then Digby walks in, extremely external and extremely inconvenient. In what specific ways does their relationship stress-test her Stoic rules? If Adora were to update her philosophy so she can keep both Stoicism and the boyfriend, what might that revised doctrine sound like?
- 4.** In a similar vein, parenting Viv short-circuits Adora’s usual Stoic strategies. Why do those tools seem to work so badly here? Is Viv just another “external,” or does the mother-daughter relationship demand a kind of porousness and mess that Stoicism doesn’t quite allow?
- 5.** Maria Semple loves a woman on the verge. Why do we, as readers, find female chaos compelling? Where did you feel the book was inviting you to laugh with Adora, and where did it tempt you to laugh at her?
- 6.** Layla moves between roles: she is mother, caretaker, hostess, curator, pseudo influencer all wrapped up in one. How does the novel complicate a simple “evil billionaire” read of her? When

did you feel genuine sympathy for Layla, and when did you feel yourself judging her alongside Adora? Do you think Layla ever fully grasps the moral stakes of the scandal she's bankrolling?

7. The book orbits around an art scandal that pulls in collectors, curators, philosophers and hangers-on. What does *Go Gentle* seem to be saying about who gets to decide what something is “worth”? If you had to pick one person or institution the book finds most culpable, who would it be?
8. Some of this novel's bleakest material, be it personal, professional or marital collapse, is filtered through a whimsical, comic tone. How did that humor shape your experience of Adora's worst moments? Did the jokes cushion the blow?
9. Celine's story about her family hiding the Mona Lisa turns history into highly intentional narrative. How does that story echo what the Lockwoods are doing with their dynasty—and what Adora is doing with her “coven”? By the end of the novel, who is best at curating their life into a story, and who is most willing to let the mess show?
10. Dog walkers; cleaners; drivers; doormen; people like Dante, Ziggy and Julio are always there, rarely centered, but never purely a part of the scenery. What does the book quietly suggest about class and labor through these background presences? How would you describe Adora's relationship to the people who make her life function?
11. Over time, Adora becomes admirably clear-eyed about what actually brings her joy. What moments of genuine joy stood out most to you while reading? Did *Go Gentle* make it easier for you to pinpoint what joy looks like in your own life?