

WORRY

JESSICA WESTHEAD

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

1. In many ways, the past plays as much of a role as the present in *Worry*, with the chapters alternating between then and now, and flashbacks of Ruth's memories appearing throughout the current narrative. Why do you think Jessica Westhead chose to structure the story in this way?
2. What were your first impressions of Ruth and Stef? Did your feelings about these two characters change as the story progressed? If so, how? Did your feelings about Fern and Amelia and Isabelle change?
3. The isolated cottage setting plays an integral role in *Worry*. How does this remote location, and the notion of "Cottage Time," influence the characters' actions and the events of the novel?
4. How do Ruth's and Stef's upbringings differ, and how do these differences affect their friendship? Why do you think Ruth and Stef have remained friends for so long?
5. What is causing the undercurrent of friction in Ruth and James's marriage? How does their relationship compare to Stef and Sammy's, and to Marvin and Lesley's?
6. On the surface, Ruth and Stef are very different mothers, representing two extremes: the overprotective "helicopter" parent versus the casual, sit-back-and-watch, "laissez-faire" parent. Is one style better than the other, in your opinion? Why? How has the culture of parenting changed since you were a child?

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7. What do you think is the reason for Ruth's hostility toward technology, especially where Fern is concerned? Do you agree or disagree with her stance? Why or why not?

8. Marvin's perceived "creepiness" is only possible because of deeply entrenched and problematic fears and expectations of male violence in society. The #MeToo movement has brought much-needed attention to this issue, but has anything really changed? Discuss.

9. Jealousy and insecurity are two of the most destructive human emotions. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not? How do these emotions affect the characters in *Worry*?

10. How do you think the events of the story would have played out if James had gone to the cottage with Ruth and Fern from the beginning?

11. *Worry* explores the relentless anxiety that so many of us (parents or not) are living with today. Where does this uneasiness stem from? Is it possible to live a life without worry?

12. The ending of *Worry* is left somewhat ambiguous. Ruth has reached the end of one emotional journey and is embarking on another. What do you think will happen when she and Fern go back home to James? How has the dynamic between Ruth and Stef changed?