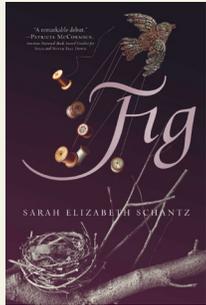


In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Jeff Langford



Fig

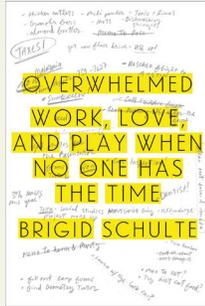
by Sarah Elizabeth Schantz

Love and sacrifice intertwine in this novel about a girl dealing with her mother's schizophrenia and her own mental illness. As she sacrifices to bring Mama back to reality, Fig begins to lose herself as well.

1. Fig's real name is Fiona. Discuss the significance of the two names.
2. How does Fig's view of schizophrenia change over time?
3. Think about the ways Fig's life is affected by her mother's mental illness. Which are the most difficult?
4. How are Fig's relatives (father, Uncle Billy, grandmother) affected by Mama's schizophrenia?
5. Fig considers the word "sacrifice" and decides she must make sacrifices in order for Mama to get better. Does Fig believe in a higher power, even though she doesn't believe in God?
6. Discuss Fig's Calendar of Ordeals
7. "In Sunday School, we color bubbly cartoon pictures of Jesus and his herd of baby sheep, and everyone there knows I'm going straight to hell." Is Fig's thought only a child's perception or do church-goers judge in this manner?
8. Uncle Billy introduces to Fig the concept of a koan, a puzzle or riddle used by Zen Buddhists to escape over-reliance on reason in order to achieve Enlightenment. How are Fig's troubles related to an over-reliance on reason?
9. Fig often scratches herself to the point of bleeding, describing the resulting feeling as being able to breathe again. Discuss the ways Fig expresses her pain, internally and externally.
10. "I'm getting better at providing people with what they want and acting like the girl they think me to be. And most important, I am learning how to help Mama when she needs my help. I am her protector." In what ways is Fig successful in protecting Mama? In what ways is she unsuccessful?
11. What role does peer ridicule (at school or other public settings) play in the book?
12. How would you describe Fig's relationship with Sissy Baxter? Even though they rarely speak, is she Fig's friend?
13. After Fig cuts herself with a razor, Uncle Billy intervenes. "All I ever needed was for someone — anyone — not just to notice but to see, and to ask me to stop, and Billy is the one who stepped up." What is the difference between "noticing" and "seeing" someone?
14. Does Mama get better or worse upon returning home after the hospital closes?
15. Imagine Fig's future. What will her life be like? What will her family and peer relationships be like?

Jeff Langford is coordinator of CBF Heartland and serves as editor of CBF's missional formation curriculum.

NEXT MONTH



Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love and Play When No One Has the Time

by Bridgid Schulte

When journalist Bridgid Schulte realized she was living a life of all work and no play, she decided to find out why she felt so overwhelmed. Schulte uncovers evidence that what the ancient Greeks called “the good life” is attainable after all.