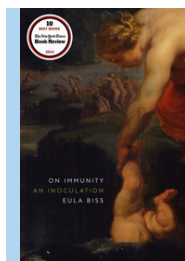


Discussion Guide



On Immunity
Eula Biss

Graywolf Press
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Vaccinations and
Immunizations

Summary

Eula Biss addresses some people's fears of the government, the medical establishment, and what may be in their children's air, food, mattresses, medicines, and vaccines. Reflecting on her own experience as a new mother, she suggests that we cannot immunize our children, or ourselves, against the world. As she explores the metaphors surrounding immunity, Biss extends her conversations with other mothers to meditations on the myth of Achilles, Voltaire's *Candide*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Susan Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, and beyond. *On Immunity* is her moving account of how we are all interconnected - our bodies and our fates.

Questions

1. One of the big questions dealt with in *On Immunity* is why vaccinations trigger fear and dread in many. To what does the author attribute this anxiety?
2. The author writes, "My son's birth brought with it an exaggerated sense of both my own power and my own powerlessness. The world became suddenly forbidding." What specifically does Biss fear? Do you relate to those concerns - or do you feel they are an over exaggeration?
3. What are your personal views on childhood vaccinations? Does Biss make a convincing case - logically, morally, and/or scientifically - in support of vaccinating infants and children? If so, what did you find most convincing?
4. On the other hand, if you remain unconvinced about the safety and efficacy of childhood vaccines, in what way did Biss fail to convince you? Where do you disagree with her? Better yet, where does her evidence fall short?
5. Much has been made of Biss's conciliatory language and the overall tone she uses throughout the book. Reviewers speak of her kindness, calmness, even her complicity as a mother. Point to some of the words and phrases she uses to de-escalate the potential for anger.
6. Biss writes that "a privileged 1 percent are sheltered from risk while they draw resources from the other 99 percent." What does she mean by that?
7. Biss believes that "from birth onward, our bodies are a shared space." Do you agree or not? Either way, where do our responsibilities lie—for ourselves, as well as for others?