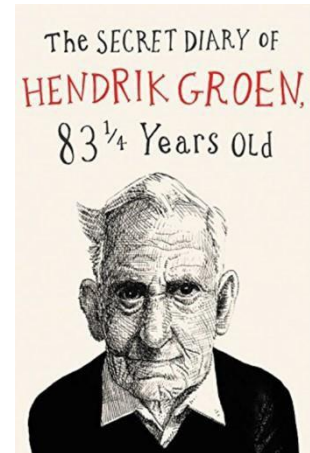


## Discussion Guide

### *The Secret Diary of Hendrik Groen, 83 ¼ Years Old*

By Hendrik Groen

1. Hendrik opens his diary with “the decision to give the world a little taste of the real Hendrik Groen.” He says he has always been a people-pleaser, always avoided confrontation, but now he’s going to shock everyone with “an uncensored expose.” Do you think the incorrigible, irreverent character we come to know over the course of the diary is the “real” Hendrik? How would you characterize who he really is, and does that differ from the character he is presenting to us? How do you think he changes over the course the story?
2. Hendrik’s friend, Evert, believes that “the only point of being alive is to kill time as pleasantly as possible. “Do you agree?”
3. What would you say it means to really “live”? Does this change as we age?
4. Hendrik and Evert are best friends but very different as individuals. Why do you think they have such a strong bond? What does the novel have to teach us about friendship, particularly between two men late in life?
5. Discuss the development of the relationship between Hendrik and Eefje. Does it turn out the way you expected? Why or why not? What do you think they see in one another that gives them this special connection?
6. Over the course of the year, Hendrik will form close friendships with the other members of the Old But Not Dead Club. How does each of these new friends shape or change Hendrik, for better or worse? Are there particular friends in your life who have changed you?
7. If you had to plan a trip for the Old But Not Dead Club, where would you go and what would you do?
8. Hendrik describes old age as following “the same trajectory as a baby developing into an adult, only the other way ‘round.” Do you think he’s right?
9. Hendrik has sworn to never let himself be turned into a dull, hopeless old person, but he can’t nail down a specific obstacle or infirmity that would, for him, be a final tipping point. He describes this as like being a “frog in a pot of water,” a situation in which each new indignity seems unacceptable until it arrives, at which point he decides he can cope until the next one. Why do you think he keeps moving the goalpost? Where would you draw the line for yourself? Do you see his reluctance as a weakness or strength? How does this contrast with Grietje’s assertion that: every fine day is one more day”?
10. In June, Management creates controversy and anger among the resident by announcing that they’ll be installing cameras in the care home’s corridors Do you agree or disagree with this decision, and why? For the elderly or for anyone: What is the line between safety and freedom?



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11. The Secret Diary is full of humorous lines and unexpected physical comedy. Talk about your favorite funny scene from the book.
12. Toward the end of his diary, after a tragedy at the residence, Hendrik writes: “I can’t make the reality prettier than it is: sad, grim and funny all at once.” Most of the time, Hendrik seems to choose to see the “funny” in everything; do you agree with this attitude? Why or why not?

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