

Discussion Guide

The Great Believers: A Novel

By Rebecca Makkai

1. Yale's group of friends is very close. In a sense, they are his "chosen family." How is this explored in the book? How does each character relate to their family, biological and chosen? Do you have a "chosen family," and if so, what brings you all together?
2. How has the culture changed regarding LGBTQ+ voices and stories since the 1980s?
3. Chicago is such a powerful presence in this novel that it is almost a character in itself. Have you ever been to or lived in a place that exerted a strong influence on you?
4. Nora, the elderly woman donating the 1920s pieces, seems completely removed from the rest of Yale's life, yet her story contains elements that can be compared and contrasted with Yale's. What similarities between his and her life are there? How has her past affected the present?
5. Fiona has suffered many losses in her life. How do you think that affected her as a mother? What are the ways in which trauma and loss are passed down through generations?
6. Do you empathize more with Fiona or Claire?
7. Do you see any parallels between the state of healthcare during the 1980s and now?
8. On page 353, Asher asks Yale, "Does it really ever go anywhere? . . . Love. Does it vanish?" Yale replies, "I mean, we never want it to. But it does, doesn't it?" What would you say to them?
9. Is the creation of artwork always a collaborative effort? How do you feel about the relationship between artist and muse?
10. What has been your knowledge of—or experience with, if any—AIDS or those affected by the disease? Has reading this novel changed any ideas you have previously had about the subject?



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