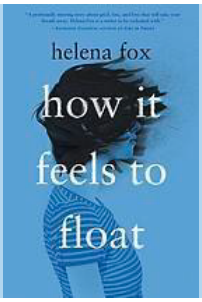
Discussion Guide



How It Feels to Float
Helena Fox

Dial Books
2019
370 pages
ISBN: 978-0525554295

LGBTQIA+ Health

Summary

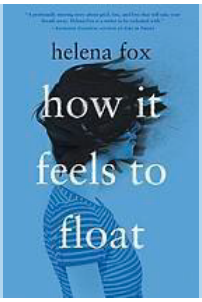
“Sixteen-year-old Biz sees her father every day, though he died when she was seven. When he suddenly disappears, she tumbles into a disaster-land of grief and depression from which she must find her way back"

Questions (Note: Facilitators will need to be sensitive to their participants’ experiences with mental health questions and may choose not to explore this topic.)

1. The novel is told through Biz’s first-person point of view. Numerous times throughout the book, Biz describes facts that appear later to not be true. How did Biz’s unreliable narration affect your reading of the book?
2. Biz has never recovered from her father Stephen’s death. He never recovered from his father Martin’s death. Is grief surmountable? How should one endeavor to cope with grief?
3. Have you felt so sad you couldn’t breathe? Has your throat hurt, your chest hurt, your bones? (p 104)
4. Bridgit’s skills at listening and encouraging Biz to speak about her feelings (p 106) are a positive step forward for her. How important is it to talk about your feelings to someone who genuinely listens?
5. Biz’s dad clearly suffered depression because of his fractured upbringing and loss of parents as a child. Martin James (Biz’s grandfather) also suffered from serious mental health issues. In hospital, Biz says, ‘You can’t escape your history. It’s like a river that follows you, blood that moves without you thinking. The past turns corners to find you.’ (p 337) In this
6. statement, Biz seems to imply that having a family history of mental illness means you’re helpless against it. Do you agree? Do you understand why Biz feels this way in this moment?
7. ‘…it’s not the worst thing. The mind does it to protect you. It’s a cushion for those moments when things are too much—it’s the brain’s defense mechanism.’ (p 367) Biz is told to not be afraid of her dissociation, and that it is a normal reaction under the circumstances. She is reassured she will learn in time how to bring herself back to ground. What do you think of this advice? Do you feel it helps to understand how the brain works and the science behind mental illness?

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8. Three traumatic events from Biz's past are revealed to us toward the end of the novel (pp. 344-351) How do you think these events have affected her life? What changes for Biz after remembering these events? Do you feel facing the past helps you move forward into the future?
9. Young people can often feel pressured to have sex before they are ready for the experience. Biz comes very close to sleeping with Tim on the beach and his wrath makes him lie about the experience and makes her a pariah at their school. What do you think affected Biz's choices on the beach? If you are unsure about doing something and feel pressured to do it, what might influence your decision? What do you think your options are?
10. When Grace has sex with Suryan, she is judged for doing so (p 80). Why is Grace 'slut-shamed' and not Suryan? Have you seen or experienced this kind of thing happening? Do you think this happens only to girls and not to boys? If so, what can be done to change this kind of gender imbalance?
11. 'I don't actually know what I am,' I say. And I think that's true. Am I bi? Am I gay? Am I something else? It makes my head fog to think about it. (p 21)
12. At the novel's opening, Biz has recently kissed Grace. She is reassured to learn that while Grace wants only to be friends, the kiss won't affect their friendship. Biz also isn't sure if she wants more with Grace. When she meets the new boy, Jasper, she's drawn to him, but she doesn't necessarily want to kiss him either. She doesn't know who she's attracted to—or if she's attracted to anyone—and by the end of the book she doesn't necessarily have an answer about her sexuality.
13. This novel explores the questioning many young people (and people of all ages) can go through regarding their sexual identity. Sexuality can be fluid, and many people may not yet be sure of their feelings. What do you think of Biz's questioning; can you relate to what she is experiencing? How important is it to be open to your feelings and not to allow society to force a presumed role upon you?
14. We now know there are many more sexual identities than heterosexual or gay. How much do you know about the different labels for sexual identity? Do you think you have more to learn? Do you think it helps to know about the broad sexuality spectrum when figuring out your sexuality?
15. Biz realizes Jasper is almost-definitely gay towards the end of the book (p 298) but doesn't ask him about it. Why does she decide not to ask? Why do you think someone might not announce their sexuality, even if they know what it is?

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