

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.** The man on the bridge tells the boy, “Do you know what the worst thing about being a parent is? That you’re always judged by your worst moments.... Parents are defined by their mistakes.” Do you think this statement is true? Does social media make it more likely to be the case these days? In what ways are people critical of other’s parenting choices? Is the bank robber a bad parent?
- 2.** In *ANXIOUS PEOPLE*, the author writes, “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans” and “The worst thing a divorce does to a person isn’t that it makes all the time you devoted to the relationship feel wasted, but that it steals all the plans you had for the future.” Do you make plans for your life, or do you let life guide you? Even if our plans often don’t turn out as we’d hoped, is there a benefit to our making them? Discuss these questions with your group.
- 3.** Zara tells her psychologist, “your generation don’t want to study a subject, they want to study themselves.” Is she speaking of millennials? Why are boomers and millennials so critical of each other? How do they see the world differently?
- 4.** Nadia (the psychologist), James (the police officer), Zara and Estelle all have stories tied in some way to the bridge. What does the bridge represent to each of them? Has the bridge’s meaning changed for them by the end of the book? If so, how?
- 5.** Anna-Lena compares her and Roger’s marriage to a shark that can’t breathe unless it is moving the whole time: “People need a project...if we didn’t keep moving, our marriage wouldn’t get any oxygen. So we buy and renovate and sell.” Why does Anna-Lena think that a project is the one thing keeping their marriage from falling apart? What surprised you about their history as individuals and as a couple? How have they underestimated each other, despite having been together for so many years?
- 6.** How did you feel when the identity of the bank robber was revealed? Were your assumptions challenged? How does the author manage to keep this a surprise?
- 7.** Zara appears to be very cold and distant to other people. Is Zara’s attitude toward people a defense mechanism? Do you agree with the psychologist that Zara isn’t depressed, just lonely? What is it that Zara can’t forgive herself for?



**8.** Estelle says her book-swapping moments with her neighbor were “an affair.” Do you agree? What counts as an affair if there’s no physical relationship involved? What book would you give as a present to a crush?

**9.** While on the apartment balcony, Zara starts to open up to Lennart. Why is he the person to whom she is able to open up?

**10.** At the start of ANXIOUS PEOPLE, the author tells us, “This story is about a lot of things, but mostly about idiots.” In what ways are these characters acting like idiots? At the end of the book, do you think that’s still a fair description of them? Are we all, by virtue of being human, inclined to act like idiots from time to time?

**11.** Jim and Jack, the father and son policemen, have a difficult relationship that is made worse by their working so closely together. What is it that annoys them about each other? What did you make of Jim’s role in resolving the bank robber’s predicament? Should he have told Jack what he was doing sooner? Why didn’t he?

**12.** ANXIOUS PEOPLE is very much a character study. How did your feelings about these characters change over the course of the book? Who is your favorite character and why? Which character surprised you the most and why?

