

Reading Group Guide for *Smoke*

1. When the book begins, Elizabeth and Ben's marriage is on the verge of breaking up, but their personal crisis is overshadowed by a forest fire that is threatening their town and their home. Can natural disasters have a positive side, in that they help us reprioritize our lives? Or are the same problems that we had before going to resurface once the crisis is over?
2. Some of the couple's issues had to do with all the things Elizabeth hid from Ben in their marriage. Why do you think she kept so much from him? What does hiding things from a spouse do to a marriage?
3. Elizabeth felt that she needed to choose her husband and the hope of having a child over her career. Do you feel that this was a fair sacrifice for her to make? How did this contribute to the problems in her marriage?
4. When we first meet Mindy, she's friends with a group of catty women whom she doesn't seem to like. Why do you think she stayed friends with them? Does this contribute to her unhappiness? Have you ever been friends with people you didn't like out of expediency or for other reasons?
5. What are the similarities and differences between Mindy and Elizabeth?
6. At first, we don't know who set the fire that's threatening Nelson, Ben, and Elizabeth's house. What does this mystery reveal about the characters?

7. Mindy evolves in this story from a shrinking violet to a strong character intent on defending her children. She also might have caused some issues in her own marriage in the process. What do you think the future holds for her?
8. Elizabeth never had a sexual affair with her coworker Andy, but they did seem to have a deep emotional connection. Do you think someone can have an emotional affair? If so, is this as bad, or worse, than a physical one?
9. As you were reading the novel, did you hope that Ben and Elizabeth would reconcile by the end? Why or why not?