

Book Club Kit

Behind every
closed door is an
open secret.



A Novel

Other People's Houses

ABBI WAXMAN



"Abbi Waxman is both irreverent and thoughtful."
—#1 *New York Times* bestselling author **EMILY GIFFIN**





Discussion Questions

- 1 In this book the neighborhood plays an important role. **What other situations create this kind of community, and how does seeing people every day change your relationship to them?**
- 2 The central character, Frances Bloom, is someone who likes to help, because it makes her feel useful. **Do you know someone like this? Do you find it easier to help or be helped?**
- 3 Frances and Michael have a very happy but not very romantic marriage. **Do you think that this will eventually drive them apart?**
- 4 Anne Porter has an affair and nearly destroys her marriage. **How important is sexual fidelity? Is it the most important element in a marriage? Can trust be rebuilt after a betrayal of this kind?**
- 5 **How much do children understand their parents' marriage? How hard is it to maintain privacy in a relationship once you have children?**
- 6 Sara and Iris are experiencing communication problems in their marriage, although it's very strong. **Have you gone through something similar, where communication breaks down for no apparent reason, and then becomes difficult to reopen?**
- 7 Anne felt she was someone else in her affair, that it was something just for her. Ava also mentions a strong desire to be her own person, driving her own choices. **How hard is it to balance a sense of self with responsibilities within a family?**
- 8 Frances and Ava are navigating their changing relationship as Ava becomes more independent. **Did you struggle against your parents or one parent in particular as you were becoming an adult? How do you think the experience of adolescence has changed since you were a teenager?**
- 9 The title, *Other People's Houses*, alludes to the impression one gets of someone just by looking at them. **How much can you really tell about someone based on their home, or the way they dress? Is appearance an expression of character, or armor?**
- 10 Bill and Julie Horton are dealing with a challenging time in a very private way. **What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of approaching it this way?**

A Conversation with **ABBI WAXMAN**



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What was your inspiration for **OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES**?

Every time I was sitting in a car pick-up line, at school, at camp, at whatever, I was always seized by an overwhelming sense of ennui. For some reason, sitting in a long line of idling vehicles, waiting for children, is a soul crushing experience. You are just a pair of hands controlling a set of wheels, your personality is utterly irrelevant. It's very weird, and I always wondered how all the other parents felt. Half of me was hoping one of us would throw open the doors, blast the stereo, and dance on the roof, like in *La La Land*. But it was more likely one of us would simply get out and walk away, leaving the soundtrack to *Frozen* playing behind us on the CD player. In that frame of mind, it was easy to wonder what other parents might do to cut the boredom.

Do you drive a carpool like Frances?

Sadly, no, not really. I pick up someone else's kid twice a week, and once a week I pick up three other kids to take them, along with one of mine, to tae kwan do, but that's it. I drive my own three to school and back, and it is often an agonizingly painful experience. To be trapped in a hot metal box with (when it's a full house) 4 fourth graders and a sulky middle schooler is like one of Dante's rings of hell. You may have heard of LA's traffic? Well, it's worse than you've heard, and occasionally I will turn my head and meet the eyes of a fellow mother in torment and for a split second it's two cows exchanging glances in the abattoir. But then the light changes, and off we go.

Which came to you first: the four families, or the idea to bring them together via carpool?

They came together, so to speak. I'm always interested in the wide range of relationships one has in life, from families to supermarket checkers to pediatricians to kids to veterinarians . . . we are different people in every context, we change and the people we're with change too. Of course, we're still the same inside, and it's the gap between the inside and the outside that I'm interested in. Neighbors are endlessly fascinating of course, as a source of speculation and drama.

Which character do you relate to most? Who was the most fun to write?

Frances is a lot like me, and certainly dresses the same, so I relate to her the most. The kids are always the most fun to write. The kids and the dogs. If I could write about just kids and dogs I would do it. Kids, dogs, cats, coffee: That's my dream cast.

What do your kids think of you being a published author?

They couldn't give less of a flying dog's fart. My fourth grader would only be impressed if I were a Pokemon trainer, and the middle schooler and high schooler are irritated by the fact that I am Still Here and Breathing, so, you know.

What's been the most noticeable difference working on your second book versus your debut?

People left me alone more, and I felt more confident saying I was 'working' when I was sitting in the coffee shop writing. I didn't necessarily feel more confident, but I felt better saying it. And speed, of course, as a result: The first book took seven years, this one took seven months.

Describe your childhood carpool experience in five words.

Walked to school, so, limited.

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door is a secret
waiting to be opened.*

What's an open secret
you know about
your neighbor or
wish you knew?

**Take a photo
& share on social**

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#OTHERPEOPLESCHOUSES**