



Book Club Discussion Guide

This printable guide is designed to spark deep, meaningful conversations for reading groups.

Introduction to the Book

In *Real Family*, the geography of a single suburban street binds five distinct adolescents into an unbreakable shield against domestic trauma, poverty, and prejudice. When their sanctuary is upended by a local tragedy and a dangerous newcomer, the characters are sent down paths of reinvention that completely scatter them, only to bring them back together a decade later to face the ultimate truth of their bond.

Discussion Questions

1. The Nature of Family

- The novel heavily contrasts the failures of the characters' biological families with the "enduring grace of the family that chooses you back." In what ways do the domestic pressures faced by Nicholas, Lopez, Anna, and Chris force them to look outward for survival? Do you believe "chosen family" can completely heal the wounds of inherited trauma?

2. Coining "Humanerance"

- In Chapter 40, Nicholas dictates an article rejecting the word *tolerance*, introducing instead his own word: *humanerance* (the innate ability to accept human differences without feeling superior or taking offense). Do you agree with his critique that traditional "tolerance" is flawed because it allows people to view others as lesser? How would practicing *humanerance* change modern social dynamics?

3. The Trajectory of Prejudices

- Lopez is established early on as the fierce "protector" of the group, yet his cultural worldview and unaddressed biases cause him to freeze and turn his back during the park ambush. How did you feel about Lopez's evolution throughout the book? How does the story highlight that even well-meaning people carry biases that can break under pressure?

4. Flawed Worlds and Elitist Escapes

- Eileen goes on a severe social climb, abandoning her old "geek squad" identity and selling out her closest friends to align with the popular crowd, only to realize the emptiness of material wealth later in life. What did you think of her decision to join the Peace Corps? Is her severe cynicism a defense mechanism, or a genuine reflection of how peer pressure alters us?

5. The Climax & Trans Representation

- The final twist reveals that the quiet, introverted Chris Mills spent a decade away from the cul-de-sac transforming into the award-winning Broadway star Rina Starr. How did this reveal reshape your understanding of Chris's early struggles with isolation and identity? How does her triumphant self-discovery reframe the book's title, *Real Family*?

6. Structural Anticipation

- Knowing that the next five books in this series will go back in time to fill in the ten-year gap for each character individually, whose solo journey are you most eager to read next? Which missing pieces of the timeline are you most curious about?

Book Club Activity: The Memory Token

- **The Prompt:** At the end of the first half of the book, Chris gives each friend a deeply personal, highly symbolic token, a ring, a globe, a doll, a sculpture, to represent the unique truth of who they are.
- **The Activity:** Have each book club member share what kind of symbolic object they would place in a "chosen family" gift bag for their closest friend, and explain the hidden meaning behind it.