

READING GROUP GUIDE

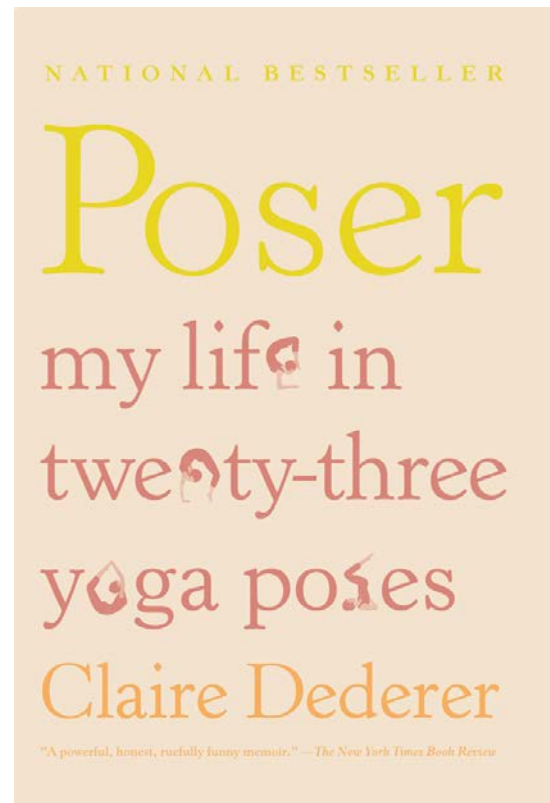
Poser

My Life in Twenty-three Yoga Poses

by Claire Dederer

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Poser* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Poser*.

About the Book

Ten years ago, Claire Dederer put her back out while breastfeeding her baby daughter. Told to try yoga by everyone from the woman behind the counter at the co-op to the homeless guy on the corner, she signed up for her first class. She fell madly in love.

Over the next decade, she would tackle triangle, wheel, and the dreaded crow, becoming fast friends with some poses and developing long-standing feuds with others. At the same time, she found herself confronting the forces that shaped her generation. Daughters of women who ran away to find themselves and made a few messes along the way, Dederer and her peers grew up determined to be good, good, good—even if this meant feeling hemmed in by the smugness of

their organic-buying, attachment-parenting, anxiously conscientious little world. Yoga seemed to fit right into this virtuous program, but to her surprise, Dederer found that the deeper she went into the poses, the more they tested her most basic ideas of what makes a good mother, daughter, friend, wife—and the more they made her want something a little less tidy, a little more improvisational. Less goodness, more joy.

Poser is unlike any other book about yoga you will read—because it is actually a book about life. Witty and heartfelt, sharp and irreverent, *Poser* is for anyone who has ever tried to stand on their head while keeping both feet on the ground.

About the Author

Claire Dederer's essays, criticism, and reporting have appeared in *Vogue*, *The New York Times*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Yoga Journal*, *Real Simple*, *The Nation* and in newspapers around the country. She has taught writing at the University of Washington. A fourth-generation Seattle native, she lives with her family on Bainbridge Island in Puget Sound.

Discussion Questions

1. Claire's first challenge is to find the right instructor. What qualities would your yoga instructor need to possess? How do Claire's expectations compare to those of other students she meets along the way?
2. What is at the heart of the perfectionism Claire sees in her circle of Seattle friends? At what point does wanting "the best" for a child become excessive and unhealthy?
3. What did Claire's parents teach her about being a parent and a spouse? How was she both liberated and hindered by their unconventional marriage?
4. How do Claire and Bruce shape each other over the course of the book? As they cope with his depression and celebrate triumphs in his career, how does her role in his life evolve?
5. The chapter titles reflect the fluctuations as much as the progression of Claire's life. Which of these poses—ranging from Camel to Downward Dog—could capture turning points in your life as well?
6. Discuss the book's title as it is reflected in the book's studio scenes. What does Claire discover about her true self as she struggles, concentrates, and adapts in class? What "impersonations" does she shed?
7. How does Claire and Bruce's concept of money change throughout the book? How is their marriage affected by the fact that they are in the same profession? As writers, do they have a different outlook on livelihood and providing for each other?
8. Claire writes vividly of her childhood with her brother. What are the greatest differences and similarities between them? What memories will Lucy and Willie have of their childhood?
9. What does *Poser* tell us about the cultural changes that have influenced women's lives in

America since the early 1970s? How do Claire's needs and expectations compare to her mother's? How does the enormous popularity of yoga reflect these cultural changes?

10. Chapter 10, "Scale," concludes with Claire's observation that "the yoga taught in the sutras was different from the yoga that was taught in *The Pradipika*, which was different from the yoga that I was taught in the studio. But I was a magpie, a bricoleur, a pragmatist: I would take what I needed, and logic be hanged." What surprised you the most as you read about the sometimes contradictory history of yoga? Which approach to yoga seems the most appealing to you?

11. In chapter 28, "Splits," Claire writes, "Boulder was a tonic, a place where your path (in all its meanings) could be the most important thing in your life, and you could be surrounded by other people on their very special paths." What do Claire and Bruce discover about their paths when they move their family to Boulder? How do the landscape, the community, and other factors capture the significant changes that occur during this chapter in their lives? Which locales have had the greatest effect on your path?

12. How does Claire's sense of self change after her parents' divorce? Why do you think they remained married for so many years?

13. What gives Claire the wisdom to make her home on the island where, in 1973, her concept of home had been shaken? What makes an island the appropriate setting for the closing passages in the book?

14. What makes *Poser* different from other books on yoga you have read? How does it buck the trend of self-help guides and memoirs?

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