



Discussion Questions

1. Emily and Jordan are opposites; Jordan was their mother's favorite, and Emily always knew this. Does your personality in some way balance or counter balance your sibling's personality? Your parent's? While being the less favorite child can be difficult, are there any advantages? Disadvantages to being the favorite?
2. Sandy Portman was a dog of a man while he was living, and he had to become a dog in order to learn how to be a true man. Do you agree with Sandy's ultimate fate at the end of the book? Do you think Einstein/Sandy changes gradually over the course of book, or just in the end? How so?
3. Emily says: "[Althea], like my mother, gave up pieces of herself in an attempt to fit into a world that didn't accept her as she was. . . ." Both Sandy's and Emily's mothers came of age during the birth of modern feminism, and each tried to lead a life that was true to who she wanted to be—ultimately paying a price for her choices. Do you feel women in this day and age can really have it all, dreams, work, and family? Do you think you see or saw your parents clearly, for who they are rather than who you want them to be?
4. Max is younger than Emily by a few years, but in many ways feels older. What made him wiser than his years? Compare Max and Sandy—how were they different? Similar? What did Emily see and need in both of them?
5. In many ways, it seems that Emily is more devastated about Sandy's cheating than by his death. Why is this? Do you think it's true to how people feel? How did Einstein help Emily recover from both—Sandy's death and his cheating—in different ways?
6. When Emily was a child, she almost drowned in the ocean, but was washed up on the beach at the last moment; she wondered then if God had looked inside her and considered her "worth saving." The idea of saving others or being saved is an important part of Emily and Sandy/Einstein's stories; Sandy feels that Emily saved him when he first met her and then she saves him again from being killed as a dog. Discuss what saving or rescuing means for these characters. How does it play into and define each of their lives? Do you feel that you've ever been rescued? Or rescued someone?



7. Emily thought she knew her husband, Sandy, but didn't fully. Do you feel it's possible to truly know a spouse or significant other? Do you think you know yours? Does he or she ever surprise you? Tell you a story about their past that you didn't realize had occurred?
8. Second chances are an important theme in *Emily and Einstein*; each character goes through a transformation of some sort, and feels the need for a new start. Describe these moments for each of them. If you were given a chance to look back on your life and do something over, would you? What might you notice about yourself and your choices that you wouldn't otherwise?
9. Emily runs the New York City marathon in order to find herself after the shock of losing her husband—and to honor Sandy. How is this decision representative of her story as a whole? Do you think it's possible to truly shake the past free or come to terms with it in order to move forward? Have you ever done something drastic, like run a marathon, with the same goal in mind?
10. Consider Einstein's line toward the end: "I had wanted to punish her for going for what she wanted regardless of the cost to herself." He says that he was jealous of her faith in something beyond what he could see. What do you think this means? How does it fit into the larger themes of the book? Do you think this difference of perception might be the reason Sandy and Emily were together, or the reason their relationship failed—or both?
11. Do you think that Emily makes the right career decision at the end of the book? Why or why not?
12. "Home" plays a central role in this story—ideas of the perfect home, the homes we make for ourselves, or the ones we're given. What do you think "home" means to Emily? To Sandy? To Jordan? Do their different needs or opinions clash? What does "home" mean to you?