

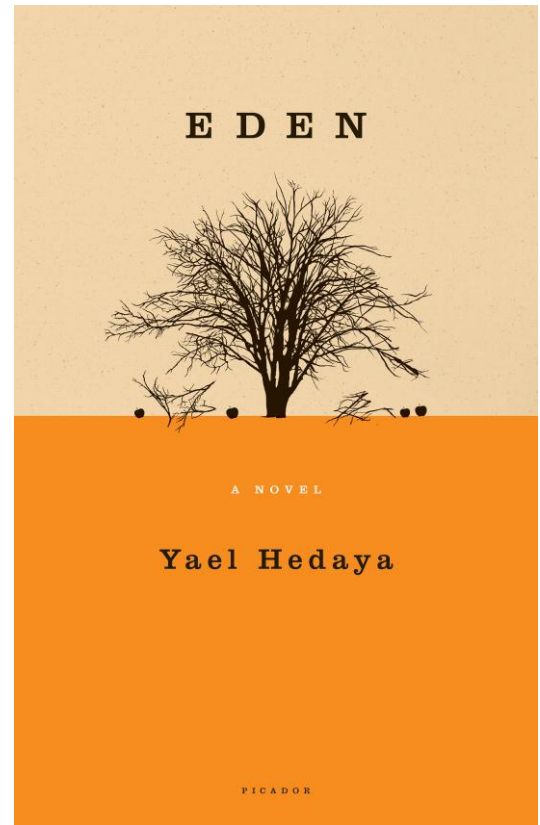
READING GROUP GUIDE

Eden

A Novel

by Yael Heday

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Eden* 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 *Eden*.

About the Book

Eden is not the paradise it appears to be. It is a stifling rural Israeli community in which upscale urban escapees Alona and Mark try to salvage their relationship under the resentful scrutiny of Roni, Mark's adolescent daughter, who feels empowered by her sexual adventures with older men. The neighbors, Dafna and Eli, are in crisis, too, their marriage rent by the torment of infertility. Set against a backdrop of Middle East fears, family entanglements, disappearing

countryside, and disappointed expectations, Yael Hedaya's *Eden* brilliantly renders the strains of unrest in what, on the surface, seems an idyllic place.

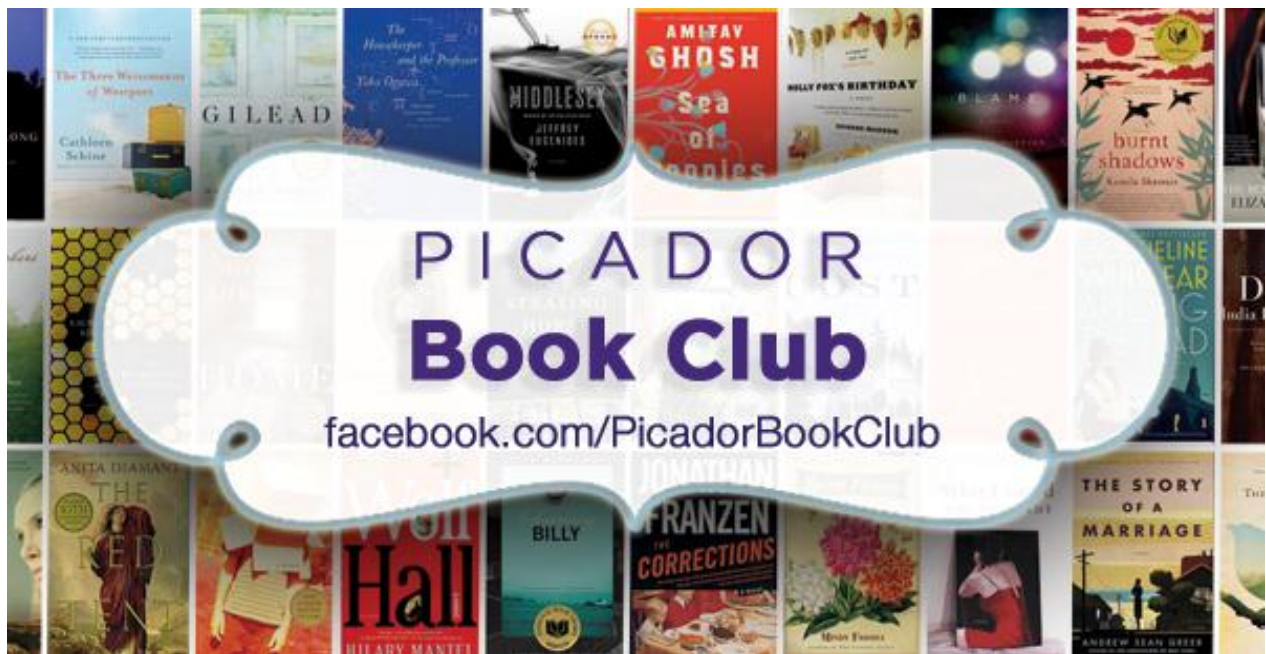
About the Author

Yael Hedaya is the head writer for *In Treatment*, the acclaimed Israeli TV series adapted for HBO. The author of *Housebroken* and *Accidents*, which was a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in 2006, Hedaya teaches creative writing at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the moshav Eden represent in the novel, in comparison with the other major locales of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem?
2. Dafna struggles with three major disappointments: her fertility, her job, and her husband. Which of them ultimately bears the most influence on her happiness, and does it change throughout the course of the novel?
3. What makes young Ido so interested in the concept of Fear? Is he depressed, as Alona believes, or is his interest a sign of intellectual growth, as Mark believes?
4. Reuven's constant annoyance with the behavior of Alona's children becomes tragically ironic in the wake of Reuven's realization about his own son. How much of children's behavior can be reasonably blamed on the parents?
5. The major disturbances in Eden – the burglary at Alona's house, the molestation of the young boy, the mysterious dog deaths – bring out many feelings of racial/cultural prejudice among moshav residents. How are even the “left-wing” characters influenced by old beliefs and stereotypes? What does Mark learn from Ali when he comes to the house to help with the dogs?
6. Roni clearly turns to new love affairs because of her devastating heartbreak over Uri. What attracts her so strongly to a romance like the one in *Last Tango in Paris*? What frustrates her most about her parents' and Alona's treatment of her?
7. Uri is a pure example of artistic self-dramatization and narcissism – which causes a great deal of grief for Alona and Roni. Is such narcissism and acting simply a side effect of living a comfortable, modern life? How does Mark, a patient restaurateur, counterbalance that attitude?
8. Why does Nechama find it difficult to accept help, especially from Alona? Who is actually “blinder” to reality: Nechama or Alona? Why does Nechama have such a difficult time babysitting her grandchildren while Alona is at the hospital with Roni?

9. Mark tells Alona that her many “bachelorette years” made it impossible for her to accept living with a partner. Do you agree with his assessment? Consider the author’s choice of naming her character “Alona.”
10. Are Mark and Alona good parents who are struggling? Bad parents with good intentions? What about Jane?
11. Eli frequently displays old-fashioned beliefs and values. How does he justify his relationship with Roni, especially given his acquaintance of Mark and the child molestation in the neighborhood? What did you make of his reaction when Roni ends the affair?
12. Why is Roni’s birth story layered with the account of her awakening in the hospital? Do you think she will get a second chance and have an opportunity to be a child again? Do you think her parents will change their behavior – or is it too late, as Roni tells Mark?
13. What is significant about the diversity of patients in Roni’s hospital room?



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