

PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

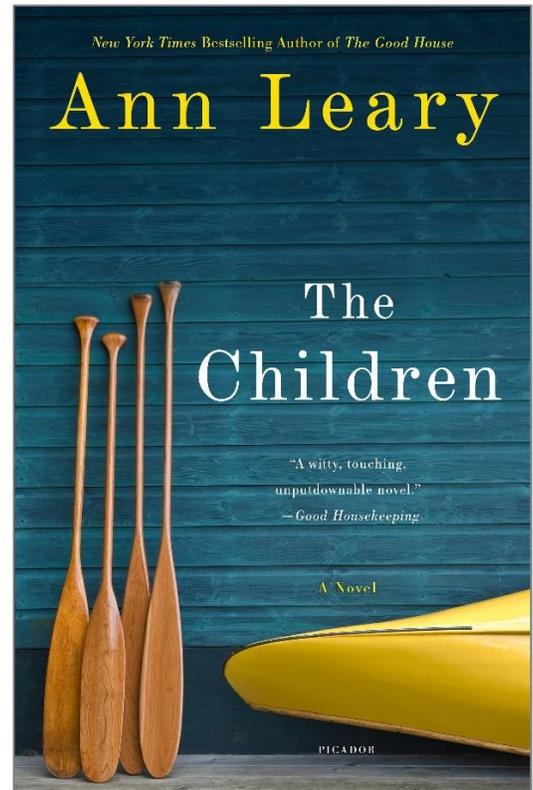
The Children

Ann Leary

ABOUT THE BOOK

From *New York Times* bestselling author Ann Leary comes the captivating story of a wealthy, but unconventional New England family, told from the perspective of a reclusive 29-year-old who has a secret (and famous) life on the Internet.

Charlotte Maynard rarely leaves her mother's home, the sprawling Connecticut lake house that belonged to her late stepfather, Whit Whitman, and the generations of Whitmans before him. While Charlotte and her sister, Sally, grew up at "Lakeside," their stepbrothers, Spin and Perry, were welcomed as weekend guests. Now the grown boys own the estate, which Joan occupies by their grace—and a provision in the family trust. When Spin, the youngest and favorite of all the children, brings his fiancé home for the summer, the entire family is intrigued. The beautiful and accomplished Laurel Atwood breathes new life into this often comically rarefied world. But as the wedding draws near, and flaws surface in the family's polite veneer, an array of simmering resentments and unfortunate truths is exposed.



ISBN: 9781250045386

With remarkable wit and insight, Ann Leary pulls back the curtain on one blended family, as they are forced to grapple with the assets and liabilities – both material and psychological – left behind by their wonderfully flawed patriarch.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Early on in the novel, we learn that Charlotte has rarely left the property following the death of her cherished stepfather, Whit. How did this influence your understanding of Charlotte and your reading of the novel, which is told through her perspective?
2. One of the first times we meet Spin and Laurel is via a flash forward. Charlotte is obsessively reviewing a video Spin took during a skiing trip with Laurel. How did the video and Charlotte's obsession with it affect your impression of Spin and Laurel before they had even arrived at Lakeside?
3. Did you question Charlotte's reliability as a narrator when she reveals that she has a blog based on a fictional life in which she is a mother with two children, including one with a life-threatening illness?

4. What did you think about Laurel when she first arrived at Lakeside? Were you just as suspicious as Charlotte and Sally?
5. As the novel progresses, we get several clues that Sally is not mentally well. How do the characters around her respond to her illness?
6. Do you think Joan was out of line when she drugged Sally with a sedative without her knowledge?
7. Much of the novel is concerned with the complexities of life in a stepfamily. Perry, in particular, seems to have taken the breakup of his parents and Whit's marriage to Joan harder than the rest of the children. Did you sympathize with his position or do you think he's being unreasonable and immature?
8. Why do you think Laurel calls Spin, Phil?
9. Whit and Joan rarely talked about money, so when Laurel brings up Spin's trust fund, Charlotte feels "dreadfully ashamed." Why do you think she feels this way? Do you think you would have felt similarly?
10. What does Laurel mean when she says, "Feelings aren't real. They're like ghosts"?
11. Do you think Charlotte setting up a donation fund for myelomeningocele research on behalf of her fictional son, Wyatt, is deceitful and fraudulent? Why or why not?
12. When Spin gets into the argument with Sally and calls her terrible names, do you think he's letting his true, pent up emotions show or has his thinking been influenced by Laurel?
13. Why do you think Whit decided not to call the police after learning that Sally was sexually assaulted as a teen? Did this change your opinion of him?
14. Do you think Laurel is solely to blame for what happened between her and Everett? Would you have forgiven Everett if you were in Charlotte's shoes?

15. After Spin's death, we learn that much of what Laurel has told the family about her life is in fact untrue. Were you surprised to find out that she had been so manipulative or were you always as suspicious as Sally?
16. Do you think Everett and Charlotte will be able to move past Spin's tragic death and forge a future together?

Guide written by Kianoosh Hashemzadeh

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