



FLATIRON
BOOKS

Being Lolita

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Being Lolita*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Being Lolita*, we respectfully suggest that you may want to wait before reviewing this guide.

1. Discuss the opening scene. How does it introduce the dynamics between Alisson and Mr. North?
2. “There is a long history of loneliness in literature. Of loneliness as a prerequisite to love. Almost like you can't really love someone unless you've been alone and loveless for a long time.” How has this idea been perpetuated through the stories we know and why might it be such a common theme? How does this relate to Alisson's own loneliness?
3. Reflecting on her decision to return to Hunt High School, Alisson thinks, “I wonder about things like fate, how sometimes things are just chosen for you, how women are chosen to endure suffering.” Why does it seem, as Alisson says, that “no matter how active or passive a girl is, she is still doomed”?
4. How does Mr. North begin to violate the student/teacher boundary between him and Alisson? In what ways does he groom Alisson under the guise of romance?
5. “At seventeen, I was deeply insecure and convinced I was not capable of being loved, and also certain that my body was my only possible source of power. I held both of these beliefs tightly, one in each hand. One did not discount the other. I knew that my only chance of getting what I wanted, more than anything—to be noticed, to feel like I was in control of some part of my life—was through being attractive.” How does society socialize young women to think that their value is tied to their bodies? What do they say about adolescence and what influences might impact these insecurities?
6. “In order to be attractive, irresistible, to be worthy of notice, was to be both beautiful and in open need, to be damaged. The perfect artistry of pretty and pain. Nabokov wrote that beauty plus pity is the closest we can get to art. I needed the teacher's gaze to feel beautiful.” Discuss this passage.
7. In what ways does Mr. North's actions betray his true intentions?
8. How do the dynamics between Alisson and Mr. North start to change when she graduates and leaves for college? What is it about being outside of the school environment that affects Mr. North's power and control? What different side of Mr. North does Alisson start to see?
9. How does Alisson become “ready to choose something else,” to leave Nick?
10. Studying *Lolita* in college, Alisson thinks, “Intellectually, I had known by the end that my relationship with Nick was problematic and unhealthy...But still, we were in love. He loved

me, he told me so. Even if it didn't work out between us, our story, our *Lolita*, was a love story. It had to be." How does Alisson begin to challenge what she thought she knew about her time with Nick?

11. Rereading *Lolita*, Alisson realizes that Nabokov and Nick "were both leveraging poetry in their storytelling, the power of allusions to other heralded male authors, to intimidate and persuade their audience of their version of things. Using language to convince the reader, to convince me, that they were smarter and knew what was best... That a pedophile-inspired, inappropriate lust was the highest form of romance." Discuss this passage.
12. What drives Alisson to reach out to Nick years later, first on impulse and then after her sexual assault?
13. What does Alisson see when she looks at her old photograph? How does the disparity between expectation and reality inform what she thought she knew about her younger self? About the teacher and his intentions?
14. In what ways has her abusive relationship with the teacher affected Alisson over the years? Her relationships with others?
15. "There's power in naming things. All the great writers know this." Both Alisson and the teacher are referred to by multiple names throughout the text. How does the use of a certain name change the context and understanding? In what other ways is there power in naming something for its true nature?
16. "I wish I understood what I was giving up when I let him write our story." What does Alisson feel she had given up? How is she taking back her story by writing it herself?
17. What is the significance of Alisson's framed Nabokov butterfly?
18. How is Alisson's work as a teacher a reclamation and declaration of her own narrative and self?