



# Reading Group Gold

## Motherhood

A Novel

by Sheila Heti

### About This Guide

In *Motherhood*, Sheila Heti's narrator grapples with the tough question of whether or not to have a child, a conflict that raises many interesting themes for discussion. The questions below are designed to enhance your reading group's conversation about *Motherhood*.



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### Questions for Discussion

1. “In a life which there is no child, no one knows anything about your life’s meaning,” (pages 95-96). Discuss this sentiment, expressed by *Motherhood*’s narrator. Do you agree?
2. Author Sheila Heti chose to keep *Motherhood*’s narrator unnamed; does this point of view add or detract from the story?
3. Heti employs a literary device throughout the novel, where the narrator—inspired by the ancient Chinese text the *I Ching*—metaphorically flips coins as she asks and answers questions of herself. How does this practice help the narrator?
4. The narrator describes many of her own, and Miles’s, dreams and nightmares. What is the role of fantasy in *Motherhood*?
5. What other leitmotifs—or recurring themes—does the author use in *Motherhood*? How do they work to advance the novel’s ideas?
6. “It is so hard to conceive of making art without an audience who will eventually see it,” (page 24). Do you agree with this statement? How does it relate to the narrator’s conflict about whether or not to have a child? The narrator talks about art being a substitute for a child, that artists are “mothers” of their work. Must one have a child to experience motherhood?



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7. Talk about the lack of societal understanding about women who choose not to have children. Why is this decision so hard for some people to accept? Do you think Sheila Heti presents the many sides to this issue in an even-handed way?
8. Discuss the novel's ending, specifically the email that the narrator receives from her mother. How do you describe their relationship?
9. "Nobody looks at a childless gay couple and thinks their life must lack meaning or depth or substance because they don't have kids," (page 270). Why don't men, straight or gay, receive the same level of judgment as women do if they choose not to become a father?
10. Early in the novel, the narrator introduces the phrase "soul of time" as the title of her book. What does this phrase mean to you? What does it mean to the narrator?
11. Discuss the narrator's boyfriend, Miles. What words would you use to describe him, and their relationship?
12. Do you think *Motherhood* is an apt title for this novel?