



Fortunate Lives

A Novel

by Robb Forman Dew

Reading Group Guide

1. The novel opens as Dinah Howells is sitting down to respond to the Harvard Freshman Dean's request for a letter describing her son David. How do Dinah's attempts at drafting letters change in the course of the novel, and what insight do these attempts afford us about Dinah's state of mind and her feelings towards her son? What do you think she is feeling as she confronts the impending departure of her oldest child?
2. David himself undergoes a transforming summer. What prompts the changes in his attitude, his shifts in perception and perspective on his life and his family and friends? How do you think his first year at Harvard will unfold?
3. Dinah and Martin responded to the death of their son Toby by grieving in very different ways. Can you explain how their respective methods of coping affected their lives and personalities? Do you think one way of coping is "healthier" than another?
4. Owen Croft is a sad but dramatic figure in Martin Howells's life. How does he act as a catalyst for Martin's grief, pain, and rage? Do you think Martin's experience would have been different had someone other than Owen been responsible for Toby's death?
5. How did Toby Howells's death alter the relationships between Dinah and Martin Howells and their two surviving children, David and Sarah? Do you think Toby's death altered the way Dinah and Martin thought about their role and their responsibilities as parents?
6. Netta Breckenridge evokes diverse reactions from the various members of the Howells family. Why do you think the Howellses accept this stranger and her daughter into their home so easily, and what is it about Netta that prompts such strong emotion from each of them? How does Netta alter the dynamic of the family?
7. The title of the novel is . Do you think the Howellses' lives are more or less fortunate than most other people's? Do the physical circumstances of their lives influence the effects of the losses that the Howellses must cope with?