



READING GROUP GUIDE

If you had to sum *The God Box* up in one word, what is this story about? What will you remember most? How would you describe this story to a friend?

Mary Lou's book tells the story of her relationship with her mother. They were so close that some have called it a love story. How did this make you feel about your own relationship with your mother? As a mother to your own children? What was it about Mary that made her unusual?

The book's early stories are set in the 1950s and 1960s in a neighborhood in Philadelphia that was largely Catholic. What about those times relate to you now—your neighborhood, your friends, your faith? What has changed? What, if anything, would you wish were the same? Can families be like that in 2012 and beyond?

How would you describe Mary Lou's family? Do you feel that it was real? Too perfect? Even though they had problems of health and loss, did you wish for more conflict? How did they resolve what came their way?

Mary Lou describes her mother as someone who was very empathetic and caring. How does someone resolve being so giving without wearing themselves out or being taken advantage of?

Where did Mary get her deep faith? Do you think that there was ever a time she didn't believe or let go? Why did she write repeated notes for the same thing?

Mary had a career, as did Mary Lou. How would you describe the difference between their approaches to work and why? Who are you more like?

The men in the book—particularly Ray, Jack and Joe—are supportive but in different ways. Discuss how they are different from each other and how they are different from the men in

your own lives? How do you resolve the deep love Ray had for Mary with his policy of ignoring or downplaying illness. What role did Ray's attitude toward wellness have in Mary's tendency to put her illness in the God Box—or Mary Lou and Jack's perfect attendance?

When Mary placed messages in the God Box, what do you think she was thinking? Why did she keep the boxes over the years, rather than throw away the resolved messages? Do you think she wanted the boxes to be found? Why did she stash them on a shelf out of sight? Why was Mary Lou the one who found them?

Talk about why you think Mary Lou kept her fertility issues to herself? What might have been Mary's reaction if her daughter had shared her challenges? Is there anything that you keep to yourself like that? If so, can you discuss it now? If not,

When Ray lost Mary, he tried to go forward in a positive way, though often long-term couples struggle after a spouse dies. What was Ray's way of thinking, why do you think it worked for him, and would that work for you?

Why did working on a house renovation during their grief create new energy for Mary Lou, Ray and Joe. Do you think they should have taken more time to grieve? Is there anything therapeutic in what is often a stressful process? What have you found to be therapeutic during stressful times in your own life?

“Always together, even in heaven” was a mantra for Mary and Ray. Do you think that spoke to their closeness on earth or was it a way for them to anticipate separation by death but seeing themselves still somehow connected?

Why did Mary Lou wait so long to start her own God Box? Do you think if her dad were still living she would have still been waiting to start? Why didn't she tap into it sooner, especially when she saw how consistent her mother was about it? And what about Jack? Why didn't he use the God Box?

Would you consider keeping a God Box for yourself? How would you start? What would you write inside if you started one tonight? Would you share yours or stash it away as Mary did? Would you do it together with your children?

Do you host a book club meeting that includes more than 25 members? If so, invite Mary Lou Quinlan to attend your reading group discussion. She can schedule a virtual visit via phone or Skype for either a Q&A session or to do a personal reading from her book, *The God Box: Sharing My Mother's Gift of Faith, Love and Letting Go*. Just email her at hello@theGodBoxproject.com and she will be in touch to finalize details. Thank you!