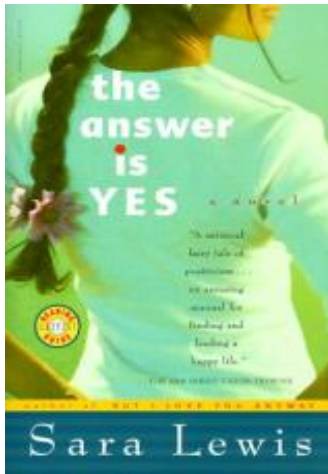


The Answer is Yes

by Sara Lewis



About the Book

Jenny Brown has three simple wishes: to enjoy a happy marriage, to have a job she loves, and to be reunited with her birth mother. But her wishes don't seem to be coming true. After moving from academic Cambridge to suburban San Diego, Jenny finds her biologist husband more interested in his transgenic mice than in her, she's fired from her steady job at the bank, and she can't locate her biological mother. Just when her life seems hopeless, Jenny stumbles onto the Institute of Affirmation, a quirky adult education center where every idea is a good one. With oddball courses such as Drawing Blindfolded, Homecooking for Pets, and Bad Habits Support Group, the institute really isn't Jenny's kind of place. Yet she finds herself returning there again and again. Could it be that the Institute of Affirmation, with its disarming director, Michael, has what she needs after all? The answer is yes!

Discussion Guide

1. If there were a real Institute of Affirmation, which course(s) would you enroll in? Can you think of a course might you want to teach?
2. In one of the classes that Jenny takes, *Making Magic and Miracles*, the teacher outlines three steps to solving any problem. Is this just a wacky, fictional parody of a new-age self-help class, or do you think Glenda Wick's three-step system might be useful for solving real-life problems?
3. Jenny experiences profound ambivalence about searching for and becoming reunited with her birth mother. If you are not an adoptee, imagine that you are. Would you want to search for your birth mother? How do you think your decision would affect others close to you, particularly your parents? If you are an adoptee, imagine that Jenny is a friend of yours. What advice would you give her about searching and becoming reunited with her birth mother?
4. How do you feel about Jenny's husband Todd? Does your view of Todd change as the book progresses and you gain

more information about Jenny and Todd's marriage? What outcome did you expect for this couple? How do you think being an adoptee has influenced the course of Todd's life?

5. Jenny's approach to life is emotional and spontaneous, while Todd is scientific and methodical. Jenny often wishes that she could be more like Todd, following a prescribed life plan with clearly defined milestones and goals. Do you think that Todd ever envies the way Jenny operates?

6. Considering that Todd is a biologist, and both Todd and Jenny are adoptees, how much of a role does the nature vs. nurture argument play in their lives?

7. Jenny has a tendency to collect "mothers," women who want to take care of her and with whom she often develops close bonds. Near the end of the book, Jenny redefines her concept of family, as "the collection of people you choose to be closest to." Are there people in your own life whom you consider "family," who may even fill the role of parent, though they are not blood relations?

8. The play, *Fields of Love*, seems to be a colossal disaster just before it unexpectedly comes together at the last minute. This production is one example of an "everyday miracle" in the book. What are some others? Can you think of moments in your own experience when seemingly hopeless situations have had surprisingly positive resolutions?

Author Bio

Sara Lewis is the author of the novels **Heart Conditions** and **But I Love You Anyway**, as well as the collection **Trying to Smile and Other Stories**. She lives in San Diego with her husband and two children.

Critical Praise

"Lewis has a gift of insight and empathy, and women of all ages will identify with her delightful young heroine. Highly recommended. "--*Library Journal*"Is this a relentlessly positive novel that shamelessly foists fortuitous resolutions on the reader, yet nonetheless can bring a tear to the eye? The answer is 'yes.' "--*The New York Times*

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