

BOOK CLUB KIT

ANXIOUS PEOPLE BY FREDRIK BACKMAN

This reading group guide for ANXIOUS PEOPLE includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

INTRODUCTION

A failed bank robber flees into an open house apartment viewing, taking its eight prospective buyers hostage. As the pressure mounts, these eight strangers slowly begin opening up to one another and revealing long-hidden truths. Each of them carries a lifetime of grievances, hurts, secrets, and passions that are ready to boil over. None of them are entirely whom they appear to be. And all of them—the bank robber included—desperately crave some sort of rescue. Humorous, compassionate, and wise, *Anxious People* is an ingeniously constructed story about the enduring power of friendship, forgiveness, and hope—the things that save us, even in the most anxious of times.

TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The man on the bridge tells the boy, “Do you know what the worst thing about being a parent is? That you’re always judged by your worst moments...Parents are defined by their mistakes.” Do you think this statement is true? Does social media make it more likely to be the case these days? In what ways are people critical of other’s parenting choices? Is the bank robber a bad parent?
2. In *Anxious People*, the author writes, “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans” and “The worst thing a divorce does to a person isn’t that it makes all the time you devoted to the relationship feel wasted, but that it steals all the plans you had for the future.” Do you make plans for your life or do you let life guide you? Even if our plans often don’t turn out as we’d hoped, is there a benefit to our making them? Discuss these questions with your group.
3. Zara tells her psychologist, “your generation don’t want to study a subject, they want to study themselves.” Is she speaking of millennials? Why are boomers and millennials so critical of each other? How do they see the world differently?
4. Nadia (the psychologist), James (the police officer), Zara, and Estelle all have stories tied in some way to the bridge. What does the bridge represent to each of them? Has the bridge’s meaning changed for them by the end of the book? If so, how?
5. Anna-Lena compares her and Roger’s marriage to a shark that can’t breathe unless it is moving the whole time: “People need a project...if we didn’t keep moving, our marriage wouldn’t get any oxygen. So we buy and renovate and sell.” Why does Anna-Lena think that a project is the one thing keeping their marriage from falling apart? What surprised you about their history as individuals and as a couple? How have they underestimated each other, despite having been together for so many years?



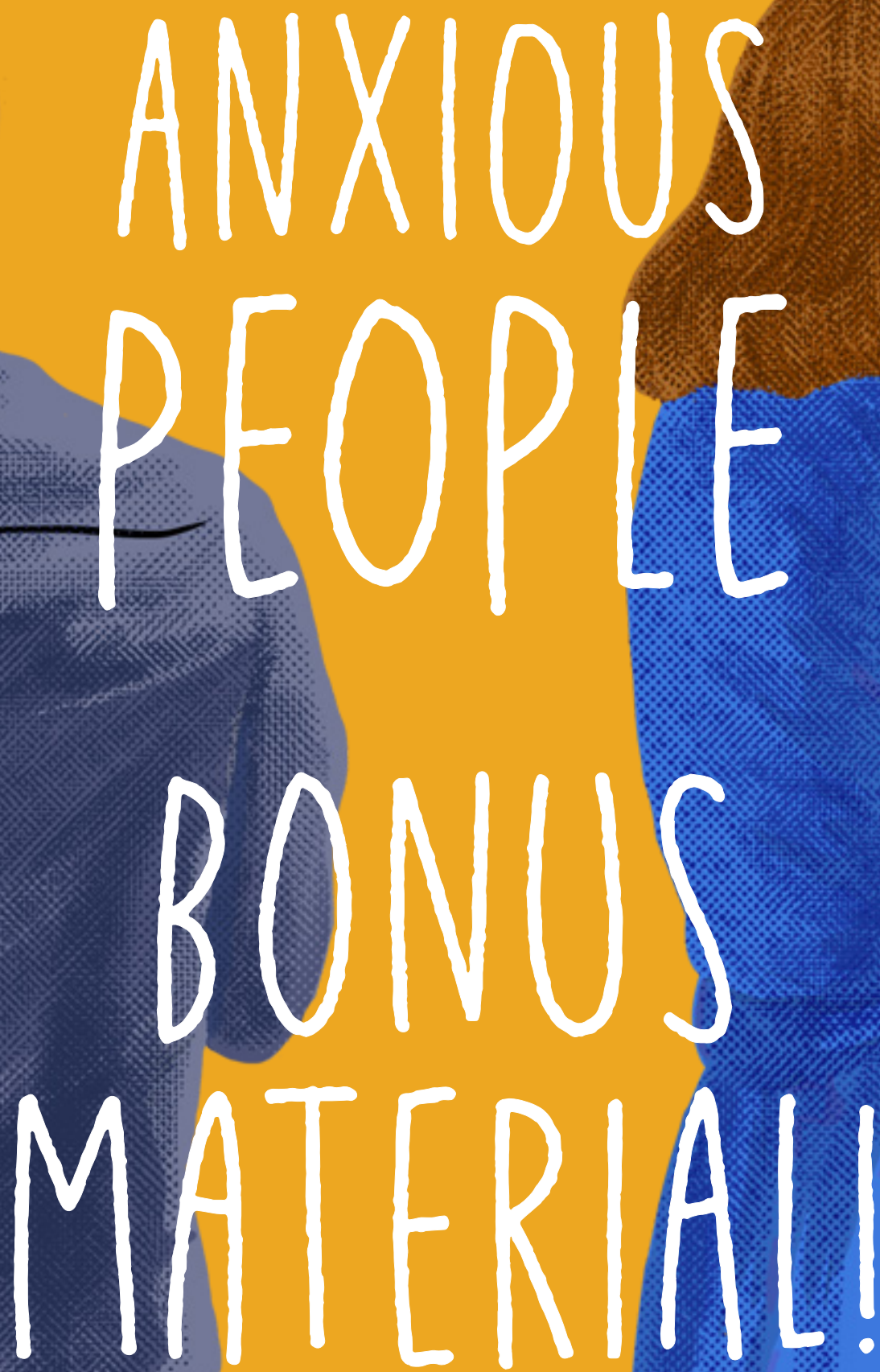
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6. How did you feel when the identity of the bank robber was revealed? Were your assumptions challenged? How does the author manage to keep this a surprise?
7. Zara appears to be very cold and distant to other people. Is Zara's attitude toward people a defense mechanism? Do you agree with the psychologist that Zara isn't depressed, just lonely? What is it that Zara can't forgive herself for?
8. Estelle says her book-swapping moments with her neighbor were "an affair." Do you agree? What counts as an affair if there's no physical relationship involved? What book would you give as a present to a crush?
9. While on the apartment balcony, Zara starts to open up to Lennart. Why is he the person whom she is able to open up to?
10. At the start of *Anxious People*, the author tells us, "This story is about a lot of things, but mostly about idiots." In what ways are these characters acting like idiots? At the end of the book, do you think that's still a fair description of them? Are we all, by virtue of being human, inclined to act like idiots from time to time?
11. Jim and Jack, the father and son policemen, have a difficult relationship that is made worse by their working so closely together. What is it that annoys them about each other? What did you make of Jim's role in resolving the bank robber's predicament? Should he have told Jack what he was doing sooner? Why didn't he?
12. *Anxious People* is very much a character study. How did your feelings about these characters change over the course of the book? Who is your favorite character and why? Which character surprised you the most and why?

ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Estelle is very much a lover of wine. With your book club, choose a wine or other beverage that you think pairs with each of the characters. Discuss your choices and have a toast to yourselves and to *Anxious People*!
2. While they are held hostage, the characters draw closer and closer together. Encourage your book club to go to an "Escape Room" event together. If there isn't one in your city, play a game that requires you to solve a puzzle together. What was each person's strength? How well did you work together?
3. Fredrik Backman's first novel, *A Man Called Ove*, was made into an Academy Award-nominated film, and his novel *Beartown* will soon be a series on HBO. With your book club, watch *A Man Called Ove* and discuss how its themes connect to and diverge from those of *Anxious People*. Discuss which actors you would cast in the primary roles if you were making a movie of *Anxious People*.



An illustration of two people from behind, one on the left and one on the right, against a bright yellow background. The person on the left has short brown hair and is wearing a dark blue, textured sweater. The person on the right has long brown hair and is wearing a bright blue, textured sweater. The text is overlaid in the center in a white, hand-drawn font.

ANXIOUS
PEOPLE
BONUS
MATERIAL!

MEET THE EIGHT WORST HOSTAGES EVER

A failed bank robber flees into a real estate open house and takes eight prospective buyers captive. Meet the eight worst hostages ever.



The Realtor

- House Tricks Real Estate Agency
- "How's Tricks?!"

Julia

- Wife of Ro
- Extremely pregnant

Zara

- Runs a bank
- Running from loneliness

Ro

- Wife of Julia
- Extremely irritated

Anna-Lena

- Wife of Roger
- IKEA enthusiast, people pleaser

Estelle

- Eighty-seven years old
- Loves wine and people to drink it with

Roger

- Husband of Anna-Lena
- Can make over houses, not his marriage

Lennart (a.k.a the rabbit)

- Professional Disrupter, *No Boundaries Lennart Ltd.*
- Hired by Anna-Lena



FOR SALE EXCLUSIVE

Two bedroom apartment
with bridge views!



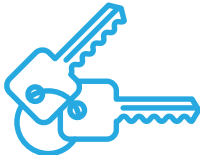
2 BEDROOM



1 BATHROOM



940 SQ FT



OPEN HOUSE
DECEMBER 30, 2020

AMENITIES

- Elevator
- Private balcony access
- Hardwood parquet flooring
- Forced air heating
- Central cooling
- Appliances functional
- Local businesses include restaurants, clothing stores, dry cleaners, stationery shops, and banks.

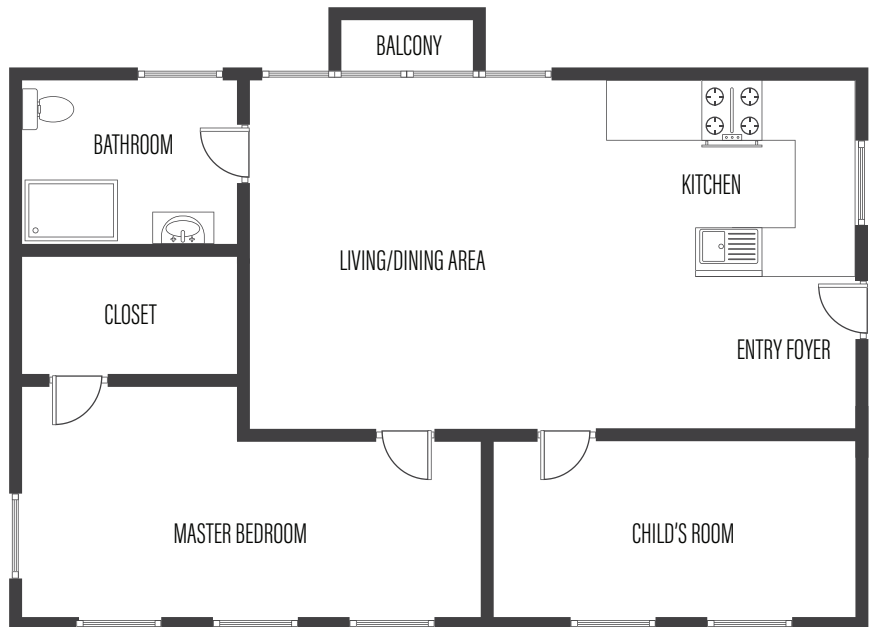
This unit is currently listed by House Tricks Real Estate Agency

Other units available: 0 active sales listings
2 bedroom, 1 bathroom, 940 square ft.

Feeling anxious about finding your new home? Relax, Anxious People, your search is over! This beautiful, sunny, well-maintained, top floor apartment could be your next home. A true two bedroom, one bath apartment, it also features an open plan layout that encapsulates the living room, dining room, and kitchen. Double exposures and open layout allows for an airy, spacious feel, perfect for entertaining. Additional rooms include one master bedroom, one children's room, one bathroom, and one closet. Huge windows in all rooms allow for plenty of natural daylight. Private balcony looks out on harbor and bridge views.

It's located in a quiet area within easy reach of the throbbing heart of the big city. Respectful neighbors. Ideal location for children. A short walk away from shops, restaurants, and banks. Very safe neighborhood; no burglaries or incidents whatsoever.

DON'T HESITATE! This prime location won't be available for long. Interested parties may attend an open house hosted by House Tricks Real Estate Agency on **December 30, 2020**. For more information and listing price, inquire today.



INQUIRE TODAY — OPEN HOUSE DECEMBER 30, 2020 — DON'T HESITATE!



“I disrupt viewings, I’m a professional disrupter, here’s my card.’ The rabbit fished a business card out of one of his socks. No Boundaries Lennart Ltd., it said, the Ltd. indicating the seriousness of the business.”

