

TEEN BOOK CLUB

May 2019 Selection

***We Are Okay* by Nina LaCour**

You go through life thinking there's so much you need... Until you leave with only your phone, your wallet, and a picture of your mother. Marin hasn't spoken to anyone from her old life since the day she left everything behind. No one knows the truth about those final weeks. Not even her best friend Mabel. But even thousands of miles away from the California coast, at college in New York, Marin still feels the pull of the life and tragedy she's tried to outrun. Now, months later, alone in an emptied dorm for winter break, Marin waits. Mabel is coming to visit and Marin will be forced to face everything that's been left unsaid and finally confront the loneliness that has made a home in her heart.

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Discussion Questions:

1. Marin feels a profound sense of loneliness as *We Are Okay* begins. She thinks, "If only I had something to take the edge off the loneliness. If only lonely were a more accurate word. It should sound much less pretty... I know that I am always alone, even when surrounded by people, so I let the emptiness in... There are many ways of being alone. That's something I know to be true." (pages 7-8). How is it possible to be "alone even when surrounded by people"? What do you think Marin means when she says this?
2. How does the setting Marin left (Ocean Beach, CA) compare with where she is now (New York)?



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3. Rather than following a linear timeline, LaCour switches back and forth between the present and the past throughout the novel. How did this affect the movement of the story? How did it affect your reading experience?
4. There is a small cast of characters (both those we actually meet and those we only hear about) in the novel. Who is the most interesting character in your opinion? Which character did you like the best? Are they the same?
5. A recurring theme in *We Are Okay* has to do with both figurative and literal ghosts. Both Marin and Gramps are haunted by “ghosts.” In the end, do they deal with their ghosts effectively? What were the consequences of how they dealt with them?
6. On page 37, the following William Morris quote is mentioned: “...everything you own should either be useful or beautiful.” How does Marin apply this to her life in New York? Do you agree with the sentiment?
7. What role do the water and ocean play in the novel? It is the ocean that takes Marin’s mother and, ultimately, her grandfather. Of Claire’s death, she thinks, “I guess when you spend of life riding waves—knowing that the ocean is heartless and a million times stronger than you are, but still trusting that you’re skilled... enough to survive it—you become indebted to the people who don’t make it. Someone always dies. It’s just a matter of who, and when. You remember her with songs, with shrines of shells and flowers and beach glass...” (pages 30-31). In what ways is the ocean both an antagonist and a protagonist in the story?
8. In the end, do you think Marin and Mabel are “okay”?



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