

Emily and Einstein

by Linda Francis Lee

1. Emily and Jordan are opposites; Jordan was their mother's favorite, and Emily always knew this. Does your personality in some way balance or counterbalance your sibling's personality? Your parent's? While being the less favorite child can be difficult, are there any advantages? Disadvantages to being the favorite?
2. Sandy Portman was a dog of a man while he was living, and he had to become a dog in order to learn how to be a true man. Do you agree with Sandy's ultimate fate at the end of the book? Do you think Einstein/Sandy changes gradually over the course of the book, or just in the end? How so?
3. Emily says: '[Althea], like my mother, gave up pieces of herself in an attempt to fit into a world that didn't accept her as she was...' Both Sandy's and Emily's mothers came of age during the birth of modern feminism, and each tried to lead a life that was true to who she wanted to be—ultimately paying a price for her choices. Do you feel women today can really have it all—dreams, work, and family?
4. Max is younger than Emily by a few years, but in many ways feels older. What made him wiser than his years? Compare Max and Sandy—how were they different? Similar? What did Emily see and need in both of them?
5. In many ways, it seems that Emily is more devastated about Sandy's cheating than by his death. Why is this? Do you think it's true to how people feel? How did Einstein help Emily recover from both—Sandy's death and his cheating—in different ways?
6. When Emily was a child, she almost drowned, but was washed up on the beach at the last moment. She wondered then if God had considered her 'worth saving.' Discuss what saving or rescuing means for these characters. Do you feel that you've ever been rescued? Or rescued someone?
7. Emily thought she knew her husband, Sandy, but didn't fully. Is it possible to truly know a spouse or significant other? Do you think you know yours? Does he or she ever surprise you?
8. Second chances are an important theme in Emily and Einstein. Describe these transformation moments for each character. If you were given a chance to look back on your life and do something over, would you?
9. Emily runs the New York City marathon to find herself after losing her husband—and to honor Sandy. Do you think it's possible to truly shake the past or come to terms with it in order to move forward?
10. Consider Einstein's line: 'I had wanted to punish her for going for what she wanted regardless of the cost to herself.' What do you think this means? How does it fit into the larger themes of the book?

11. Do you think Emily makes the right career decision at the end of the book? Why or why not?

12. 'Home' plays a central role in this story—ideas of the perfect home, the homes we make, or the ones we're given. What do you think 'home' means to Emily? Sandy? Jordan? What does 'home' mean to you?