

Waiting for Daisy: A Tale of Two Continents, Three Religions, Five Infertility Doctors, an Oscar, an Atomic Bomb, a Romantic Night, and One Woman's Quest to Become a Mother

**By Peggy Orenstein
Reading Group Guide**

Peggy Orenstein was never sure she wanted to have children—she loved her life the way it was. And through her work, as an acclaimed journalist and the author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* and *Flux: Women on Sex, Work, Love, Kids, and Life in a Half-Changed World*, Orenstein had seen exactly how difficult parenting can be, how easy it is for women to lose themselves in their newfound status as mothers. So it's no surprise that it took five years of marriage—and countless discussions with her husband, who did want kids—before she finally made up her mind that yes, she was ready to be a mom. And then she got breast cancer.

Over the next six years Orenstein did almost everything humanly possible to have a baby, starting with “fertility sex” and escalating to high-tech Assisted Reproductive Technology (sometimes involving the purified urine of postmenopausal Italian nuns), along with several attempts at international adoption. The story of how she finally does become a mother is funny, honest, and deeply, achingly accurate. Any woman who's ever struggled with infertility or questioned her own maternal instincts will laugh—and cry—in recognition on every page.

For Discussion

1. The subtitle of this book covers many of the milestones on Orenstein's journey to motherhood. In your opinion, which was most significant? Why?
2. On page 3 Orenstein says, “I'd had no idea how easy it would be to lose all sense of reason, to do things I swore I never would to become a mother, then go further beyond that.” Have there been instances in your life when you've done this, whether or not they're fertility-related?
3. Orenstein's husband, Steven, wants children because, as he says on page 8, “I think of life as kind of like an amusement park ride. If you're going to go, you should ride every ride at least once. And having kids is like the big, scary rollercoaster. You can have a good time without riding it, but you would've missed a significant part of the experience.” Is this an apt description of parenthood?
4. In explaining her ambivalence about motherhood, Orenstein says on page 11: “The issue wasn't whether I wanted to turn into my mother if I had a child, or even whether I feared I would; it was that I believed I *should*.” What did she mean by that? How did her experience researching her books color this expectation? How do you feel about motherhood in regard to your own mother?
5. Many of Orenstein's concerns seem to be about identity—as one woman says to her on page 97, “Once you become a mother, you're *only* a mother.” In your experience—as a mother, a friend, a daughter—how has that proved true? And false?

6. What does feminism have to do with Orenstein's journey to motherhood? What about class issues? Politics?
7. The idea of destiny plays a large role in Orenstein's thinking. How did it affect her decisions? Have there been times in your own life where you believed destiny was a key factor?
8. Shrines of one sort or another also recur throughout the book. Why do you think there are so many different kinds of fertility-related totems? Do you think they helped Orenstein in her quest, or encouraged her obsession, or served another purpose entirely?
9. Re-read Orenstein's definition of the *Eishet Chayil*, "the original woman who does too much," on page 49. How have the implications of the term changed over the years? Do you consider yourself a modern-day example? If not, do you know someone who is?
10. Discuss Steven's role in this story. Does your opinion of him change, and why? Why do you think their relationship was able to withstand so many years of stress?
11. In Japan, which has one of the highest abortion rates in the world, there are shrines where women can honor their aborted or miscarried fetuses. Compare the Japanese approach to fertility, abortion, and miscarriage with our own. Which did Orenstein feel more comfortable with, and why? What about Steven? And you?
12. What is your understanding of the term "Wagamama" (page 97)? How does it apply to women in this country, vs. in Japan?
13. Discuss the significance of Orenstein's trip to Hiroshima, beginning on page 116. How does it relate to the idea of destiny?
14. Compare Orenstein's attitude towards adoption to her husband's. Why does it seem like a relatively simple decision for one, but not the other? How do their attitudes change over time, and why?
15. On page 225 Orenstein is upset when a friend suggests that "Everything happens for a reason." Why was she bothered by this assertion? How do you feel about it?
16. At the very end of the book, on page 226, Orenstein says, "Mine is the luck of realizing that happiness may only be the respite between bouts of pain and so is to be savored, not taken as an entitlement. I suppose I've finally understood the concept of *wabi-sabi*." Re-read her definition of the term on page 126—what do you think helped her to finally understand it? Is that a good thing? How might *wabi-sabi* apply in your own life?

Suggested Reading

Adopting After Infertility by Patricia Irwin Johnston; *Love and Infertility: Survival Strategies for Balancing Infertility, Marriage, and Life* by Kristen Magnacca; *Unsung Lullabies: Understanding and Coping with Infertility* by Janet Jaffe, David Diamond, and Martha Diamond; *A Little Pregnant: Our Memoir of Fertility, Infertility, and a Marriage* by Linda Carbone and Ed Decker; *Sweet Grapes: How to Stop Being Infertile and Start Living Again* by Jean W. Carter and Michael Carter; *The Bitch in the House: 26 Women Tell the Truth About Sex, Solitude, Work, Motherhood, and Marriage* edited by Cathi Hanauer; *Waiting for Birdy: A Year of Frantic Tedium, Neurotic Angst, and the Wild*

Magic of Growing a Family by Catherine Newman; *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined All Women* by Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels

Peggy Orenstein is the author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* and *Flux: Women on Sex, Work, Love, Kids, and Life in a Half-Changed World*. A contributing writer to the *New York Times Magazine*, Orenstein has also written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Parenting*, *Discover*, *MORE*, *Mother Jones*, *Salon*, and the *New Yorker*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, Steven Okazaki, and their daughter, Daisy.