

## ***The Other Room* by Kim Friedman**

### **Book Club Discussion Guide**

Three years after the sudden, mysterious death of their 1-year-old daughter Lily, Josef Coleman, a high-strung New York surgeon, and his editor wife Claudia Macinnes remain mired in anguish and grief. Their mourning has left them reaching out for different things in different ways: Josef for a primal, physical connection that Claudia can no longer bear, and Claudia for a connection of the soul that Josef has never really known how to offer. The questions below are designed to guide discussion about the many subtle aspects of the novel--the significance of its imagery and the complex relationships of its characters.

What choices did Claudia and Josef ultimately make in coping with the emotional aftermath of Lily's death? What is each looking for? How is their suffering – and their response to it – similar? How is it different?

The title of this novel seems to refer to many distinct rooms. Identify these multiple references and discuss the role that physical space plays in this story.

The author has chosen to write this narrative in a modular rather than linear structure, with multiple points of view and shifting time frames. In what ways does this structure serve the interests of the novel? What is gained by replaying certain scenes from multiple perspectives? Is Claudia a reliable narrator? Why or why not?

Claudia's complex relationship with her sister Yvonne takes on added weight as the story progresses. Discuss the role Yvonne's character plays in this novel. In what ways does she serve as a kind of alter-ego to Claudia?

The therapeutic process is an important element in this story. Discuss the crucial role that Stuart – and the process itself – play in helping Claudia to finally extrapolate herself into the future.

Saul, the elderly neighbor with Alzheimer's, serves as a kind of latter-day prophet in this story. In many ways, in many scenes, he betrays an understanding far more comprehensive than that of those around him. Discuss.

In a very real sense, the dramatic question of this novel is: will the *family* survive the death of this child? Lily's death reverberates through many different relationships in different ways. In what ways does the death ultimately move the family forward? In what ways does it buckle under the weight?