



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK

Cutting Teeth

Reading Group Guide

Welcome to the Reading Group Guide for *Cutting Teeth*. Please note: In order to provide reading groups with the most informed and thought-provoking questions possible, it is necessary to reveal important aspects of the plot of this novel—as well as the ending. If you have not finished reading *Cutting Teeth*, we respectfully suggest that you consider waiting before reviewing this guide.

1. Rhea, Darby, and Mary Beth each have different approaches to parenting. How would you characterize their individual philosophies and with which of these philosophies do you most identify?
2. At the start of the novel, Miss Ollie confronts Rhea about the contents of Bodhi's lunch box. She later tells Rhea that she cares about the kids in her class as if they were her own children. Does Miss Ollie overstep her boundaries with Rhea? When is it appropriate to express an opinion about someone else's parenting choices?
3. Renfield's syndrome is a fictional medical condition that causes those afflicted to crave blood. If such an outbreak of Renfield's occurred in a real school, how do you think that community's reaction would compare to the one in the novel?
4. As Darby deals with the impact of Rhea's interview in which Rhea suggests parents be "joyously available" to feed their children blood, Darby ponders the state of parenting: "Last she checked, intensive parenting was a relatively new trend, but now it's—*what?*—the norm, the expectation, the baseline standard? Baby enrichment classes, oven-baked sweet potatoes, and patient, positive, lobotomized directives to sit in a child's feelings with the—it takes a lot of time and money" (p. 217). How have the expectations of what it means to be a "good parent" changed across generations? What factors do you think have contributed to those changes?
5. Darby laments about the "sheer entitlement" her family has to her, "from Jack all the way up to Griff" (p. 74). Throughout the book, she wants to reclaim parts of herself, particularly her body. Yet, when it's revealed that Griff is hiding his improv classes and therapy appointments from her, she's miffed. Is Darby being hypocritical? Is she entitled to that information?
6. At the end of chapter 44, Rhea contemplates Mary Beth's decision to cover up the crime she believes her daughter committed. She questions: "Is Mary Beth saying that when it comes to her children there is no line too far afield to cross, or even more, that there is no

line at all?" (p. 299). Is there a limit to how far a parent should go to protect their child? How would you go about defining that limit? What do you make of Mary Beth's final decision?

7. In chapter 41, Rhea sets off a chain of confessions from the parents at Little Academy. One might conclude that no one is as good a parent as they purport to be, nor as bad a parent as they believe themselves to be. What's a confession you could make that may feel cathartic for others to hear?
8. As Rhea considers coming clean with Marcus about her arrest record, she narrates her belief that, "people love a good redemptive arc for fathers . . . but mothers? No. There's no redemption for mothers. Mothers better be born perfect" (p. 197). Is this true? Do you believe mothers are held to a higher standard as parents than fathers? Why?
9. If one of the children were ultimately exposed as having been Miss Ollie's killer, how do you think it would have impacted their life growing up?
10. Mary Beth believes it is simpler to be someone's child than to be someone's parent. To what extent do you agree with this statement?
11. What's the one thing no one tells you about becoming a parent?