

## Reading Guide for *Hit by a Farm* - by Catherine Friend

Many reading guides included in books make me feel as if I'm back in high school, taking an English Lit essay exam testing my comprehension of the book. Was I paying attention at the end of the third chapter when the name of her true father is revealed? Do I understand why the author did what she did in Chapter Ten?

Shouldn't a book discussion discuss more than the book's plot? Don't books force us to think outside our lives? To think about how we were affected by the book, or not? Seems a reading guide should lead the discussion in this direction.

That's why I've included a reading guide. I don't want to test whether you remember the sheep gestation period is five months, or that I have one sister, or that roosters can be nasty. Instead, it might be more interesting to see if my sharing my life has affected yours.

To this end, here are some possible discussion questions for your book group:

1. Memoir is usually about a slice of a person's life. In *Hit By a Farm*, were you satisfied with the size of the slice I included? Did you want more? Less? If you were to choose a slice of your life to share with others, which would it be?
2. Creative nonfiction works best when a number of themes, or threads, run through the book. When those different threads cross each other, there's tension. Three threads seem to be a good number for me. What three threads or themes or plot lines run through *Hit By a Farm*?
3. What three threads run through your own life? What happens when these threads connect or cross? With so many of us living lives with multiple threads, why don't our heads just explode?
4. One of the book's chapters is called "Meeting My Meat." What did you think of this essay? How did it make you feel? Do you know where your meat comes from? Do you know how it's raised? Is that even important? Are there any aspects of eating meat that make you uncomfortable?
5. Melissa and I have been together for almost 23 years. In this book we have opened our front door a crack and let you, the reader, inside parts of our relationship, so it should come as no surprise that I consider myself married in every sense of the word, except legally.

How do you feel about marriage? Should the states limit marriage to a man and a woman? After reading *Hit By a Farm*, do you think the love two women, or two men, feel for each other is different than the love a man and a woman feel for each other? Why is this such a difficult issue? How would the lives of heterosexual people change if gays and lesbians were allowed to legally marry?

6. In *Hit By a Farm* I struggle with boundaries—how to establish them, how to know when to defend them, when to ignore them. What sorts of boundaries do people create in their lives? If you successfully create and maintain boundaries, how do you do this? If you're terrible at creating and defending boundaries, why?

7. In "Nature's Sentimental Journey," I complain that poems often just focus on the lovely side of nature. Do you witness much nature in your life? Have you seen the uglier side of nature? Do you consider livestock, such as sheep, cattle, hogs, and chickens, to be part of nature? Are they something different?
8. My becoming a farmer for the sake of love seems a little crazy, now that I've gone and done it. I know I'm not the only one who lost sight of her dreams (at least temporarily) for the sake of her partner. If this has happened to you, how did you find your way back? If you haven't yet, what do you need to get there? Who can help you? How can we help each other?
9. Why are the things that go wrong in our lives often funnier than the things that go right?