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Discussion Guide for This Is How I Find Her by Sara Polsky



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Ages: 13-18, Grades: 7-12

Plot Summary

Sophie has always lived her life in the shadow of her mother's bipolar disorder: monitoring medication, making sure the rent is paid, rushing home after school instead of spending time with friends, and keeping secrets from everyone.

But when a suicide attempt lands Sophie's mother in the hospital, Sophie no longer has to watch over her. She moves in with her aunt, uncle, and cousin—a family she's been estranged from for the past five years. Rolling her suitcase across town to her family's house is easy. What's harder is figuring out how to rebuild her life.

And as her mother's release approaches and the old obligations loom, Sophie finds herself torn between her responsibilities toward her mother and her desire to live her own life, Sophie must decide what to do next.

Reviews

"This is How I Find Her perfectly captures the dichotomy between the home we find ourselves in, the home we find for ourselves, and that lonely frightening road in between. A heart-wrenching and sincere debut."—Sarah Wylie, author of *All These Lives*

"This quiet novel provides honest insight about conflicting emotions felt by families struggling with bipolar disorder. Sophie's inner journey from resignation to hopefulness is authentically portrayed and will provide great comfort to any teen contending with a parent's affliction. Perceptive and sincere."—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Artful and accomplished, Polsky's first novel offers a heartfelt and vividly insightful examination of a family in crisis. I couldn't put it down."—Michael Cart, Critic and *Booklist* Columnist

Common Core State Standards

CCR-RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Amy's illness shape the lives of all those around her – Sophie, Leila, Cynthia, John, James, and Amy herself? Use details from the text.
2. Sophie does not know why Leila stopped being her friend when they started middle school, but Leila does. Imagine the book being written from Leila's point of view. How would the story be different? The same?

3. Why does Sophie not tell anyone at school that her mother is in the hospital?
4. How does Sophie's understanding of what home means evolve once she moves in with her family and starts work in her uncle's architecture office?
5. Why do you think it took Amy's new suicide attempt to break the silence in the family?
6. Sophie and Leila are cousins, as well as friends. How does this make their relationship more complicated? Less complicated?
7. Rumi's poem (chapter 25) is perfect for their school poetry project, because it describes exactly how each character is feeling at the time. Imagine each of them – Sophie, James, Leila – creating a written analysis of the poem based on their own lives. What would they each write?
8. Sophie's understanding of her responsibility to her mother changes over time, enabling her to instigate the best solution for the entire family. Discuss how guilt – and Sophie's understanding of guilt – changes over the course of the book.



About the Author

Sara Polsky's fiction has appeared in *Fictitious Force* and *Behind the Wainscot*. Sara is a writer and editor at *Curbed NY*, and her articles and essays have appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Forward*, *Poets & Writers*, and other publications. She lives in New York City. This is her first book. www.sarapolsky.com