

Book Club Discussion Guide



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Fight Night

By Miriam Toews

About the author:

Miriam Toews is the author of seven bestselling novels: *Women Talking*, *All My Puny Sorrows*, *Irma Voth*, *The Flying Troutmans*, *A Complicated Kindness*, *A Boy of Good Breeding*, and *Summer of My Amazing Luck*, and one work of non-fiction, *Swing Low: A Life*. She is a winner of the Governor General's Award for Fiction, the Libris Award for Fiction Book of the Year, the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize, and the Writers Trust Marian Engel/Timothy Findley Award. She lives in Toronto.

Source: Penguin Random House Canada:

(<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/authors/55356/miriam-toews>)

About this book:

Fight Night is told in the unforgettable voice of Swiv, a nine-year-old living in Toronto with her pregnant mother, who is raising Swiv while caring for her own elderly, frail, yet extraordinarily lively mother. When Swiv is expelled from school, Grandma takes on the role of teacher and gives her the task of writing to Swiv's absent father about life in the household during the last trimester of the pregnancy. In turn, Swiv gives Grandma an assignment: to write a letter to "Gord," her unborn grandchild (and Swiv's soon-to-be brother or sister). "You're a small thing," Grandma writes to Gord, "and you must learn to fight."

As Swiv records her thoughts and observations, *Fight Night* unspools the pain, love, laughter, and above all, will to live a good life across three generations of women in a close-

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knit family. But it is Swiv's exasperating, wise and irrepressible Grandma who is at the heart of this novel: someone who knows intimately what it costs to survive in this world, yet has found a way—painfully, joyously, ferociously—to love and fight to the end, on her own terms.

Source: Penguin Random House Canada:
(<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/670388/fight-night-by-miriam-toews/9780735282414>)

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about the title FIGHT NIGHT. Why do you think Toews chose this title? What are the characters fighting?
2. Who is the book addressed to, and why is this character not present in Swiv's life? Why do you think Toews chose a letter for the novel's form? What other formal choices do you notice?
3. What kind of kid is Swiv? What makes you think so?
4. What about Grandma/Elvira and Mom/Mooshie? What kind of people are they, and does Swiv see them clearly?
5. Toews often uses exaggerations in Swiv's narration. What is the effect of this choice? What other idiosyncrasies do you notice?
6. What does Swiv mean when she refers to her family's Editorial Meetings? How do the meetings themselves differ from what we might assume based on that phrase? Why do you think she uses it?
7. Who is Willit Braun? Why is he so infamous in Grandma's circles?

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8. In Chapter 10, the book changes stylistically, reflecting a transcription of Grandma's words. How did this change impact your reading?
9. What happened to Mom/Mooshie in Albania? Why and how does this discovery influence your perception of her character?
10. Talk about Grandma and Swiv's trip to Fresno. Why was it necessary for Grandma to go on the trip, despite her poor health?
11. In Fresno, the people Swiv meets talk about how strong Mom/Mooshie is. How did you understand this emphasis? How did you understand Mom's reaction when Swiv reports this back to her?
12. Talk about the first time Gord meets Grandma at the hospital. What can we glean from the scene?
13. Depression and other forms of mental illness go unnamed in FIGHT NIGHT, but they remain present in the background. How does Toews achieve this? How does she approach these realities?
14. Talk about the tone of the book in contrast to what happens in the book. How do these two elements work together?
15. Recommended: Read Miriam Toews' ALL MY PUNY SORROWS and discuss the two novels together. What overlaps in subject matter do you see? How do the two books deal differently with family, humor and bravery?

Source: Reading Group Guides (<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/fight-night/guide>)