

Safekeeping

by Jessamyn Hope

Discussion Questions for Book Groups and Clubs

- 1) *Safekeeping* features a diverse cast of characters, varied not only in age, gender, religion, and ethnicity, but also in their personal ambitions, strengths, and weaknesses. Does anything unite them? Did you relate to some characters more than others?
- 2) Set on a kibbutz, *Safekeeping* explores the tension between personal identity and the experience of belonging to a community. How else is this tension explored in the novel? Do you experience this tension in your own life?
- 3) In literature an object can convey a theme or emotion. In *Safekeeping*, what does the brooch represent? The pomegranate? Are there any other evocative objects in the novel?
- 4) The title *Safekeeping* applies to more than the brooch. What else in the novel needed, and perhaps failed, to be kept safe? What do each of the characters want to protect?
- 5) *Safekeeping* highlights how people persevere despite terrible loss. How do the different characters react to hardship? Why is Adam less capable of coping than the others, seeking escape in drugs and alcohol? Can he be blamed for his weakness? What questions does the novel raise about willpower?
- 6) All the characters in *Safekeeping* are affected by the past—their own memories and the consequences of history. How do the characters differ in the ways they deal with the situations history has given them? Can we decide how much of the past we will allow to determine our future? Do you think what happened to your ancestors affects who you are today?
- 7) What is redemption? Are all the characters in *Safekeeping* seeking it? Do any of them achieve it? Is there a difference between redemption and fulfillment?
- 8) Some of the characters in *Safekeeping* are exiled from their homes; others want to protect the home they have; others dream of a better home elsewhere; and a few worry they no longer belong to any place. What do we mean when we call a place “home”? How much of a person’s sense of security and self is tied to place? Is the concept of home important to you?
- 9) Most of *Safekeeping* takes place over the summer of 1994, a precarious time for Israel. It was the beginning of Palestinian suicide bombings but also the height of the Peace Process. Elsewhere in the world the Iron Curtain had fallen, apartheid was ending in South Africa, and the United States economy was on an upswing. Many of the characters, especially young Ofir, are optimistic about the next century, confident it’s going to be so much better than the last one. How did you feel when reading Ofir’s optimism? Did you relate or find him naïve?
- 10) How did the ending of the novel make you feel? Did it end the way you expected? Do you think it realistically could have ended otherwise for any of the characters?