



Discussion Questions

Little Children by Tom Perrotta

Source: St. Martin's Press (www.stmartins.com)

1. Compare Mary Ann and Sarah. What do they have in common? Discuss how each mother interacts with her child and how each woman's mothering style would work in the real world.
2. What role do sports – skateboarding and football – play in the novel and, in particular, in Todd's life? Even though Todd is a primary caregiver, he still seems to find free time; what outlet does Sarah have? How can the portrayal of Sarah and Todd be extended to the role of women versus men in society, and does the book do a fair job in representing the two genders?
3. Very few criminals in our culture are more vilified than pedophiles. What do you make of the portrayal of Ronnie McGorvey? Is he a uniquely evil character in the novel, or is he more similar to some of the other characters than they would like to admit? Is he treated fairly by the people in the town?
4. When Sarah and Mary Ann argue about Madame Bovary at the book group, what are they really arguing about? How do Sarah's and Mary Ann's personalities color their arguments about Madame Bovary?
5. Consider Richard and Sarah's marriage: how could two people who are apparently incompatible end up together, and at what point should their unhappiness with their marriage outweigh the commitment they have made to each other and to their child? How harmful is each betrayal to their marriage: Sarah's relationship with Todd, and Richard's obsession with Kay? What would you do in each of their situations?
6. Clearly both Sarah and Todd had delusions about the nature of their relationship; what did each truly expect from the other and how were these expectations met/broken? Were each character's expectations realistic? Were you surprised and/or disappointed by the ending?

7. Which characters do you empathize most with in the novel, and why? Which characters are the least sympathetic? Do your sympathies/empathies shift over course of the novel, and if so, how did the ending change your opinion of the various main characters?
8. What do you make of the motley gathering in the playground at the end of the novel – with Mary Ann, Sarah, Larry Moon, and McGorvey?
9. Is *Little Children* an appropriate or deceptive title for this novel? What are the different ways the phrase is employed within the book? To what characters does it best apply? In the end, is the title simply descriptive, or does it work on multiple levels?
10. A critic has suggested “all the noncriminal [characters] in this story are better off in the end than they were at the start.” Is this true? Can you think of any exceptions?
11. Critics have differed a great deal in characterizing the tone of the novel. One called it a “gentle satire,” while another claimed “Perrotta has moved into the suburbs with a wrecking ball.” Which critic do you agree with? How do you account for this discrepancy in these descriptions?