

Discussion Questions

Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting

by Clare Pooley

1. Do you ever talk to strangers on public transportation? If not, why do you think that is? Which of the characters would you most—and least—like to share your commute with?
2. Iona feels that, at fifty-seven, she's gone from "It Girl" to "Past-It Girl." Do you think that society, and the workplace, undervalue women once they pass fifty?
3. The story is set in 2019—prepandemic. Do you think your experience of working from home has affected your view of the daily commute and your reading of the novel?
4. Each of the characters in the book make assumptions about one another, which often turn out to be wrong. What assumptions did you make about them, and who surprised you the most?
5. All the characters in the story are changed in some way, as a result of meeting one another. Who do you think are the most transformed?
6. Iona talks about having experienced sexism, ageism, and homophobia. We know that these factors work together to influence Iona's experience, but which one do you think appears to have an outsized impact on her life?
7. Iona loathes some of the "modern" ways of working—the brainstorms, beanbags, and corporate speak, for example. Do you agree with her? What are your least favorite aspects of corporate life, or the work world in general?
8. There are three married couples in the story: Iona and Bea, Piers and Candida, and David and Olivia. What does this story teach us about long-term relationships? Candida walks away from her marriage because she believes Piers changed the rules. Do you have any sympathy for her?
9. The characters in the novel span three generations. What do you think teenagers, millennials, and boomers can learn from one another?
10. Martha believes she is not a "normal teenager." Is she right? What do we learn about the world when we see it through her eyes?

11. Iona spends her life helping people with their problems, yet she's unable to ask for help herself. Do you think this is a common problem? Why is that?

12. Do you agree with Iona's rules for commuting? What would your rules be?

Questions from Penguin Random House

