

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Disobedience by Naomi Alderman

- Why does Ronit return to London? (Is it really just the candlesticks?) Does she accomplish her purpose?
- What is the significance of the candlesticks? Pgs 14, 35 Do they increase in significance over the course of the story? (Hartog's bribe, left to her by her father...)
- Why was Ronit unable to cry over the loss of her father until that Sunday evening just before Hinda Rochel and her two friends showed up? Pg 121 (How do you grieve for someone who has alienated you? "*he didn't call for me*", etc. How do you forgive? Who needs to forgive whom and for what reasons? Is Ronit also finally grieving for her mother?)
- Why was it so necessary for Ronit to leave Hendon and not so essential for Dovid or Esti?
- Why is Ronit such a threat to the community in Hendon? (even before she announces that she's a lesbian – independent woman, troublemaker...) What is Hartog afraid of?
- Why does Ronit tell everyone about the fictitious Miriam? Pg 89 It wasn't right that Ronit "outed" herself at the Hartog's Shabbos dinner – yet, if she hadn't that wouldn't have been right either? What do you think? Pg 89
- Hinda Rochel asks Ronit if her job makes her happy and/or fulfilled. What do you think? Pg 124
- Why does Ronit accept Hartog's offer/bribe? Why does she change her mind? Why does she attend the hesped and why does she do so in disguise? (back to "coming out" vs. staying silent) Why doesn't she confront Hartog there?
- When Esti was 12 or 13, she had already begun to love Ronit. Pg 94; On page 105 Esti tells Ronit, "I've been waiting for you all this time." If Ronit means that much to her, why didn't Esti ever say or do anything?
- When Esti goes to the mikvah the first time, she is very specific in her prayer. When she returns monthly, she can only say "Please" - what should she pray for? Pg 22
- What do you think Esti's hopes and expectations are in anticipation of Ronit's arrival?
- Does Esti love Dovid? Does she love Ronit? (Does Ronit love anyone?) On page 94, Esti thinks that "loving Ronit seemed to demand some denial of herself." Do you find this ironic – doesn't her marriage to Dovid require greater self-denial?
- Why did Dovid marry Esti? Does he love her? Why does he choose to stay married?
- Why hadn't Dovid and Esti slept in the same bed since their first year of marriage? Pgs 62, 168
- Why did Esti join Dovid in bed on the night of Ronit's arrival? Pg 63
- A turning point in the novel is the scene where Dovid finds Ronit and Esti in bed together. How was this necessary to advance the plot? What momentous changes did this cause in each of the characters and what did they learn? (momentous enough that the three of them talk things out, break the silences that are between them)
- How much is choice vs. circumstance in each of their lives? Or, how do each of the main characters delineate between choice and circumstance?



Skokie Public Library

5215 Oakton Street
Skokie, Illinois 60077
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax
www.skokielibrary.info

Skokie Public Library Trustees: Diana Hunter, President/President Emerita;
John Graham, Vice President; Dayle Zelenka, Secretary;
Richard Basofin; Susan Greer; Zelda Rich; John M. Wozniak
Director: Carolyn A. Anthony

- On page 184, Ronit asks Esti, “Did you find happiness?” and “Is it still enough for you?”. What do you think?
- How is happiness defined in the novel? (chapter 10). Can Ronit ever be happy? Can Esti? What will that require of each of them?
- How does the theme of speech from the Rav’s dvar Torah resonate throughout the book? Pgs 6-7
- What do we know of Rav Krushka? What about his relationship with Ronit? How can he be so beloved by his congregation and so cold to his own daughter?
- Regarding the various women who run into one another in the butcher shop and/or bakery Friday morning, do any of them have the right to pass judgment on Esti and Ronit? Pgs 112 -116
- In one conversation between the gossiping women of the community, one asks how being accepting to Ronit and Esti (to lesbians) is any different than accepting your relatives/friends who don't strictly obey other rules (dietary, etc.)? What answer did she receive? Why was this a greater threat?
- What is Ronit trying to say when she states, “I can’t be an Orthodox Jew... but I can’t not be one either.”?
- Why didn’t the synagogue board make plans for the Rav’s successor before his death?
- The Rav has 7 other nephews – all older than Dovid – why aren’t any of them considered? Pgs 75, 79
- If Dayan Goldfarb is one of the most influential Rabbis in Britain, why wasn’t he considered? Pg 86
- Which character changed the most over the course of the story?
- Where do you see each of the three main characters ten years into the future? Do you agree with the author's predictions?
- Do you think any of the three main characters (Ronit, Esti, Dovid) have any regrets?
- Why do you think the author titled the book “Disobedience”?