

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## The Family Markowitz by Allegra Goodman

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- Each member of *The Family Markowitz* has his or her own idea about what a family should be. How do grandmother Rose, sons Ed and Henry, and granddaughter Miriam define family? How do these ideas lead to conflict?
- Religion plays an important role in this book. In what ways does religious observance change from one generation to the next? Do these changes reflect shifts you have observed in the Jewish American family?
- Henry Markowitz's wedding to a non-Jewish English woman is a shock to the family in more ways than one. What do you think motivates his marriage to a woman who is so different from the people he has grown up with in Brooklyn? Do you find his intermarriage disturbing? Why does he believe that his intermarriage is something he has been preparing for all his life?
- Contrast the two weddings in the book, Henry's wedding in the Oxford chapel, and his niece Miriam's neo-Orthodox celebration. What are the values expressed in these events? Do they have anything in common?
- Discuss the changing roles of women in the Markowitz family. How do Rose, Sarah, and Miriam differ in their ambitions, opportunities, and views of themselves? To what extent do you think history and social trends shape these characters and their dreams? To what extent does individual personality play a part?
- Some reviewers have written that Rose Markowitz is the central character in this book. Do you agree? Or would you propose a different character as the linchpin of the family?
- Books, libraries, poems, and articles are central motifs in *The Family Markowitz*. Why is the written word so important to this family?
- Each of the stories in this book is told from a different point of view. How do the shifts in point of view affect your feelings for these characters? Did you find that you changed your mind about some of these characters as you came to the end of the book? Or did you stick to your first impressions?
- A pressing issue throughout the book is the need to care for the elderly Rose Markowitz. What do you think of the choices Ed, Sarah, and Henry make? Do you sympathize with Rose in her lonely plight? Or with her harried children? Or both?
- Allegra Goodman has been called "a kinder, gentler Philip Roth." Do you think this statement is accurate? Or do you think a better comparison might be made with another writer?



**Skokie Public Library**

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