

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Rules of Engagement by Anita Brookner

- Elizabeth places great emphasis on following “the rules”. Where do these rules come from?
- What sustains the lifelong relationship between Elizabeth and Betsy?
- Why did Elizabeth marry Digby?
- Compare the affairs that each character had with Edmund. What was each woman looking for in the affair?
- Do you see a softer side of Elizabeth as she is caring for Digby when he is dying and when Betsy was as well? How does she react to each of these deaths?
- Does your opinion of Elizabeth change at all by the end of the book?
- At one point Elizabeth states that women are not in revolt against men but against their mothers. Discuss her relationship with her parents.
- Are both women victims of their pasts? How do the experiences of their childhoods impact their adult relationships?
- Why does Elizabeth initiate the relationship with Nigel? Why does she end it?
- Elizabeth repeatedly considers if she would be better off abroad. Why doesn't she act on this, do you think it would have made a difference in her life?
- Elizabeth and Betsy come of age in the 1960's. Why is it that neither enjoyed the freedom or took advantage of the opportunities available to women then?
- As our narrator, Elizabeth tells us the internal workings of other peoples' heads. One reviewer states that “we trust that Elizabeth, even in invention, will be accurate.” Do you as the reader trust her?
- On page 251 this quote is said to be the crux of the story: “We had seen ourselves always as lovers, whereas sensible persons, or perhaps those with a greater understanding of the world, make their peace with existing circumstances, and know joy and pleasure with the sort of acceptance afforded by a settled state, in which there is no need of concealment. ... Quite simply, we had not grown up; worse, we had not known this until now.” Do you agree?



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