

Book Club Discussion Guide for Where It Began

- 1.) Why does Gabby characterize herself as sub-regular? Are there dimensions of her personality and behavior which you would consider deficient?
- 2.) Gabby is attracted to Billy even when he gives clear signals that he is not dealing honestly with her. In general, what makes bad boys so appealing to some women?
- 3.) Gabby describes Andy and Andie as representing “the only good marriage any of us has ever seen.” What do you make of their relationship? Do you find their relationship appealing, or too close?
- 4.) What makes Lisa and Anita relatively immune to the allure of the populars? (Or are they?)
- 5.) Why is everyone at Winston so eager to talk/spill their guts to Gabby when she first returns to Winston? Is this just *schadenfreude* (happiness at someone else’s misfortune), or is something else going on?
- 6.) Billy insists that had Gabby known the facts of the car crash, she would have taken the blame voluntarily to save him. If Gabby had remembered everything, what do you think she would have done? What would you have done?
- 7.) Does Gabby ever come to terms fully with her drinking? Do you see her as having a drinking problem? What do you make of her reaction to AA?
- 8.) Is Gabby’s leaving Winston, in fact, a good thing? Would returning to Winston for senior year have offered more opportunity for growth? Many people have a “quitters never win, gutting it out builds character” philosophy. Does that hold in this situation? How do you know when to walk away and what would you advise Gabby to do? Are there situations in which you’ve struggled over whether to stick something out or get out?
- 9.) If you were Lisa, Anita, or Huey, would you have handled the situation as they did, given Gabby’s insistence that she wouldn’t talk about what happened? Would you have made the same assumptions they did?
- 10.) If Gabby had been on the verge of being sent to a juvenile detention facility, do you think Billy would have come forward? What about Lisa, Anita, or Huey, who could have saved her by revealing what really happened?
- 11.) Should Gabby have realized that Billy was manipulating her before Huey showed her the photos? Is Gabby, in some sense, manipulating Billy? Is Gabby a reliable narrator? If unreliable, what does Gabby tell the reader that you don’t buy?

12.) Consider the values and goals of the different parents in the story and how those values impact their children. How much of Billy's role in grooming Gabby to take the blame for his drunk driving accident do you think originates with Billy and how much with Agnes? How much of Gabby's magnetic pull toward Billy and willingness to hang in for so long has to do with her parents?

13.) Some of Gabby's unquestioned beliefs limit her range of options. For example, when Mr. Rosen suggests that she could study with a brilliant potter at community college and then transfer to Cal State to work with a genius ceramicist, she sees this as tantamount to tattooing a scarlet "F" for failure on her forehead. What's this about? What is it that makes everything but being on track for Harvard feel so sub-regular to her? What are some of the other things she believes that might impact her life in unfortunate ways?

And the corollary question, 13a) Gabby makes fun of a lot of things that have meaning for the people around her, such as Lisa's religious beliefs, Madeline Hewlett's animal rescue and involvement in Huey's life, and Anita's family's desire to keep Anita close to her Indian culture. How do you explain this and how does this detached amusement affect Gabby's life?

14.) If this is relevant to your group: Discuss the issues of coming to a new culture (or being born into a family with cultural, religious, or ideological differences from the majority culture) and being caught between the family's values and the demands of the new culture, with reference to Anita's frustrations.

15.) What do you think were Huey's true motives in pasting the photo into all of the Winston Wildcat yearbooks? Are there situations in which you've stood up in a dramatic way, or wish that you had?

16.) How does Gabby change over the course of the book? Is there anything she missed that you'd like to tell her? Are there points in the book when you wanted to scream at her?

17.) Gabby thinks that Ponytail is clueless throughout much of the book. Is Ponytail any good as a therapist? If you don't think she was satisfactory, what would you have done differently as Gabby's therapist?

18.) If Billy were to fly to Florence and apologize up and down for days, what do you think would happen?

19.) Assuming Gabby learns enough Italian to communicate with the hot Italian architecture student, is she ready to have a healthy relationship with him?

20.) What does Gabby mean when she says she's figuring out how to be herself?