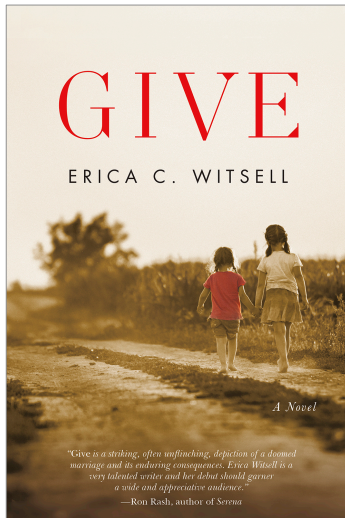


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *GIVE*, A NOVEL BY ERICA C. WITSELL



1. *Give* begins with Laurel's perspective, although it eventually becomes clear to the reader that she is not the protagonist of the story. Why do you think the author chose to begin the novel with her perspective? Do you think this was an effective choice? As a reader, when did your perception of Laurel's character begin to shift?
2. Ron Rash has described *Give* as a "striking, often unflinching, depiction of a doomed marriage and its enduring consequences." Do you agree that the marriage between Laurel and Len is "doomed?" What events or circumstances eventually lead to its disintegration? Do you agree with Emma that Len and Laurel's divorce is the "best thing that could have happened?" Why or why not? How would the characters' lives have been different if Len had stayed with Laurel?
3. When Len decides to pursue his relationship with Sarah, he knows this will mean that his daughters will lose Sarah as a caregiver. He is, in effect, putting his own happiness before that of his daughters. What did you think of his choice? How much of their own happiness should parents be willing to sacrifice for their children's well-being? Is it fair for parents to take chances when they risk hurting their children?
4. In the early scenes in the novel, Laurel really struggles with new motherhood. Discuss how Laurel's isolation compounds the challenges she faces as a new mom. Do you think moms today face similar challenges? If so, what could help alleviate them?
5. Near the end of Part One, Sarah reflects that Len always said that she "just smelled right" to him. Do you agree that this kind of visceral feeling about a partner is important as a basis for a romantic relationship? Sarah also implies that her own choice was more reasoned. What role, if any, should rational thought play in decisions about long-term relationships?
6. Although Emma loves Baymont in some ways, she never feels secure there. Discuss the incidents at Baymont that contribute to this insecurity. For which of these events do you think Laurel is responsible? Do you think that she is unfairly blamed for things that were beyond her control?
7. How do Emma and Jessie experience their summers at Baymont and their relationship with Laurel differently? Are there any ways in which their experiences are similar? Have you ever shared an experience with someone only to find that the way they experienced it was very different from your own? How is your relationship with your parents different from that of your siblings?
8. Do you agree with the judge's decision in the custody battle between Laurel and Len? Why or why not?
9. After Laurel takes her father to court, Emma seems to cut off all ties to her birth mother until the very end of the novel. What do you think of her choice to do this?

10. In Part Three, Emma struggles with what her attraction for other women means for her sense of self. Is she a lesbian? A dyke? Bisexual? In what ways does a person's sexual orientation impact their identity? Does the idea of a continuum of sexuality, rather than fixed categories of gay and straight, make this question of identity any easier?
11. Laurel eventually enters into a polyamorous relationship with Jim and his long-term partner, Sue. What role does this relationship ultimately play in the novel's plot?
12. At one point in the novel, Jessie says that no one has a right to decide "who or how many consenting adults choose to love." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What additional challenges might polyamory pose in a relationship? Are there any advantages polyamory might have over monogamy?
13. What do you think are Laurel's primary motivations in asking Jessie to donate her eggs? What do you think of this request? Why do you think Jessie agrees to Laurel's plan? Do you think she made the right choice?
14. Discuss Jessie's decision to have an abortion while she is a graduate student. How, if at all, does this decision impact the course of her life and the plot of the novel?
15. Why do you think Jessie keeps her gift to Laurel's family a secret from her parents? Is she right to do so? What are the consequences of this choice?
16. Why does Sue eventually leave Jim and Laurel? What is your opinion of this choice?
17. Describe Emma's grief after Katherine leaves her. Can you relate to her experience? Why or why not?
18. When Katherine ultimately apologizes for leaving Emma, she justifies her actions by saying, "I wasn't in love with you anymore." Emma responds by saying that love is a choice. Which view of romantic love do you believe is the most accurate? Why?
19. Describe the role of forgiveness in *Give*. Who is forgiven, and why? How has forgiveness been important in your own life?
20. Sarah Viren, author of *Mine*, has written that *Give* shows us that "... sacrifice and selfishness both play a role in how we parent and love." Do you agree? Discuss how sacrifice and selfishness play out in the novel and in your own parenting or relationships.
21. Is *Give* a good title for this novel? Why or why not?