

Nothing to Lose by Alex Flinn

Reading Group Guide

by the author

Warning: Contains major plot spoilers. Do not read before reading the book!

1. Kirstie says Michael's problem is "not knowing whether to be loyal to someone else, or to yourself." How does this issue of loyalty come to play in the book? Does Michael eventually resolve it? How?
2. Why does Michael feel he can't talk to his friends about the problems at home, but considers telling Karpe? Is Michael's concern reasonable? What would have happened if Michael had told Tristan?
3. Why does Karpe take Michael to the fair? Do you believe Michael's stated reason ("It beat going home") for going?
4. To what extent does Michael's relationship with Kirstie affect the other events of the book? How do you think things would have been different if he'd never gone to the fair?
5. Think about the different roles played by the three important female characters in the book – Lisa, Kirstie, and Angela. What do they have in common, and what are their major differences.
6. Why is Michael attracted to Kirstie? How does she differ from other women he knows? By contrast, what do you think attracts Kirstie to Michael? Why does she care what he does?
7. Michael initially views the carnies as freaks, but then feels part of them, more than with his own friends. What is the cause of this change of heart? Have you ever fantasized about running away to a different kind of world? What do you think it would be like?
8. Kirstie has a very fatalistic view of life (Whatever will happen, will happen). Is she right? Does she change this view in the course of the book?
9. Why does Kirstie tell Michael the story about the demise of the freak shows when they are at the party. Were the states right to ban freak shows?
10. Does Walker view himself as a villain? How do you think Walker justifies his abuse of Lisa in his mind?
11. Michael says, "From what I could tell, lots of guys beat on women?" Do you think this is a true statement, or just his perception based upon his experience with his mother and her boyfriends? Do you believe certain women are more likely to be abused than others?
12. Loneliness is a theme which runs throughout the book. Kirstie tells Michael the carnies are lonely even though they're never alone, and Michael is very frank with himself/the reader about his loneliness. Are other characters lonely as well? Which ones?
13. Angela walks Michael through a cross-examination such as he might face in a real trial. What do you think the purpose of cross-examination is? Does it help the jury see the truth, or only allow the party with the smartest lawyer to win? What is Angela's purpose in showing Michael this?

14. The court finds Michael's killing of Walker to be justifiable homicide based upon Michael's statement that he believed that Walker was about to kill Lisa and he used reasonable (though deadly) force to prevent the death. Without this belief, the killing would not be justified. Is this a good law? Should Michael have been justified in killing Walker under these circumstances? Should he have been justified even if the risk of death was not *immediate* but *eventual*?
15. The defense Lisa planned to use at trial, battered spouse syndrome, is based upon the battered spouse's evidence that she was in such fear of the victim that she had no means of escape other than killing him. This defense does *not* require that the killer have been attacked at the time of the killing. Would Lisa have been successful in this defense? Did she have no means of escape? Do you think battered spouse syndrome is a good defense?
16. Where do you see Michael in five years? How about Lisa? What do you think happened to Kirstie after she stopped answering Michael's e-mails?
17. Consider the title phrase, *Nothing to Lose*. What does it mean? Does Michael truly have "nothing to lose" in the book? Do any other characters?

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