

Discussion Guide for Lara M. Zeises' *Bringing Up the Bones*

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Bridget Edelstein is taking a year off before she goes to college, to try to recover from the recent death of Benji, her longtime best friend-turned reluctant boyfriend. Rather than accept support from her friends or family, Bridget turns to Jasper, a wonderful guy willing to nurse her wounded soul—when she lets him.

As she comes to terms with life without Benji, and the truth about their relationship, Bridget learns that being able to love deeply and truly is essential even if the one you love doesn't feel the same. More importantly, she discovers that happiness pinned to another person is only an illusion. Now it's time to find happiness on her own.

1. *For Delaware Readers:* What was it like to read a book set in Delaware? To recognize the places where Bridget is living and working? Did it make the characters seem more realistic to you? What other effects did the setting have?
2. *"Benji never really wanted to be my boyfriend, just my best friend, but I loved him from the first time I saw him, and I didn't know how to stop. So after seven years of best-friendship and seven months of outright begging, he reluctantly gave in and agreed to a trial relationship."*

What does this passage say to you? What ideas about Benji and Bridget do you get? Do you think Benji was right to try dating when he didn't seem to care about Bridget that way?

3. Jasper says, "It's my fault. I should've known I couldn't compete with the dead guy." Do you agree with this? Is it Benji that causes problems between Bridget and Jasper? What other issues cause tension between them?
4. Bridget is much closer to the Gilbert family than to her mother. How does Bridget's relationship with her mother affect her? Do you think that Bridget's desire to be part of Benji's family makes her relationship with her mother more difficult?
5. Do you think it's "creepy" for Mrs. Gilbert to ask Bridget to clean out Benji's room? Do you believe that Bridget knew him best, as Mrs. Gilbert said?

6. Bridget spends the first third of the book openly mourning Benji. In Chapter Thirteen, she reaches bottom; she takes down the Benji shrine and burns all her sweatpants. What makes her reach this point? Is it truly the bottom? Is she finished grieving Benji at this point?
7. Do you think Jasper helps or hurts Bridget as she tries to deal with Benji's death? Is a new relationship a sign that you've moved on? What does it mean for their relationship that she waits so long to tell him about Benji?
8. Ellie is Bridget's best girlfriend, providing much support while Bridget is grieving. What do you think about the revelation that Ellie was writing to Benji? Do you believe Ellie's statement that they were talking about Bridget?
9. Is it a coincidence that the book starts in the early autumn, and ends on New Year's Eve? What do you think the author was trying to express with this choice?
10. What do you think of the last chapter? It seems like this is the breakthrough that Bridget has been working towards since the beginning of the book. Do you think that Bridget has, in her words, "lived [her] life as a reflection of other people"?
11. Was therapy helpful to Bridget? In light of the end of the book and Bridget's epiphany, do you agree with Dr. Margie that Bridget equates physical intimacy with love?
12. Is Bridget's grief presented in a way that seems realistic to you? Do you think she grieves so much because she has lost her boyfriend—or because she has lost her best friend? At any point, did you want to shake her and say, "Get over it!" Or did you have sympathy for Bridget and thought she'd figure it out by the end of the book?