Nothing to See Here

A novel by Kevin Wilson

Reading Group Guide

1. The twins in *Nothing to See Here* spontaneously combust when they get agitated. The fire they generate can burn others, but leaves them unharmed. What might the nature of this condition represent? Did your perception of the condition change at all throughout the book? Did you become more used to it? Less?

2. This novel offers a unique perspective on the complexities of love and what it means to look beyond a person’s differences. What sort of preconceived notions does Lillian bring to this job? How do Bessie and Roland challenge those notions?

3. Lillian works hard to establish and maintain a bond with the twins. What is it about Lillian that makes her uniquely equipped for this job? Why is she able to connect with them while others have failed?

4. Throughout the book, many characters look for ways to control or cure the twins’ condition. Think about the variety of methods put forward. What did you think of each method? What might the methods suggested reveal about each person who suggested them?

5. At the end of chapter three, Lillian expresses surprise that the children’s hair remains unsinged after they burst into flames: “I don’t know why, with these demon children bursting into flames right in front of me, their bad haircuts remaining intact was the magic that fully amazed me, but that’s how it works, I think. The big thing is so ridiculous that you absorb only the smaller miracles.” Do you relate to this sentiment? What other “smaller miracles” are present in the story?
6. The novel offers examples of how class dynamics can shape an individual’s experience: Lillian and Madison’s differing experiences at their elite high school, for instance, or Lillian’s early days as an employee on the Roberts estate alongside Carl and Mary. How does wealth and privilege shape the story? Which characters most feel the impact of this?

7. How does Lillian’s dark sense of humor amplify the book’s themes of love, acceptance, and parenting? Did you enjoy the use of humor throughout the novel? What did it tell you about Lillian’s character?

8. Lillian makes a big life change at the end of the novel. What did you think about her journey from Madison’s high school roommate to eventual caretaker to her step-kids? What do you think she ultimately saw in Roland and Bessie that led her to make such a change?

9. Madison and Lillian have a complicated relationship that veers from deep affection to intense rivalry to bitter resentment to uneasy allies. Do you think they’re foils for one another or something else? How does their competitive edge play into their relationship? And do you think their relationship will live on after the events of the novel?

10. Nothing to See Here explores different representations of family structure and dynamic. How do the family units presented at the beginning of the book evolve and change? What does Lillian value in family? Which characters share those values, and which characters differ?
Nothing to See Here reviews

https://www.barnesandnoble.com/review/nothing-to-see-here
https://www.npr.org/2019/11/02/775190787/kevin-wilson-is-on-fire-in-nothing-to-see-here

Jenna’s Book Club: Kevin Wilson discusses Nothing to See Here


PBS NewsHour Interview with Kevin Wilson

https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/this-novel-makes-fun-of-your-childs-meltdown

Library Love Fest panel with Kevin Wilson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sW5E_yOaebQ

1995 Highlights

President: Bill Clinton
Vice-President: Al Gore
Secretary of State: Warren Christopher

Cost of Living 1995
Cost of new house $113,150
Average Income per year $35,900
Average Monthly Rent $550
Cost of a gallon of Gas $1.09

Internet users in 1995: 16 million worldwide (.4% of population)
Internet users in 2020: 4648 million worldwide (59.6% of population)

Cell phone users in 1995: 33 million (U.S. only)
Cell phone users in 2020: 260 million (U.S. only)
January – WB network debuts (precursor to CW)  
- O.J. Simpson murder trial begins

March – Yahoo! Is incorporated  
- Forrest Gump wins Best Picture Oscar

April – Oklahoma City Bombing

June – Alanis Morissette releases Jagged Little Pill album

July – Forbes announces Bill Gates is the richest man in the world with net worth of $12.9 billion dollars (In 2020, his net worth is $110.7 billion and he’s the 2nd richest man in the world.)  
- Post Malone is born in Syracuse, NY

August – Microsoft releases Windows 95  
- “Macarena” by Los del Rio is released

**Popular Songs**
1. "Creep" ... TLC  
2. "Take a Bow" ... Madonna  
3. "This How We Do It" ... Montell Jordan  
4. "Have You Ever Really Loved A Woman?" ... Bryan Adams  
5. "Waterfalls" ... TLC  
6. "Kiss From a Rose" ... Seal  
7. "Gangsta's Paradise" ... Coolio featuring L.V.  
8. "Don’t Take It Personal (Just One of Dem Days“ ... Monica  
10. Water Runs Dry – Boys II Men

**Most Popular Television Shows**
1. Seinfeld (NBC)  
2. ER (NBC)  
3. Home Improvement (ABC)  
4. Grace Under Fire (ABC)  
5. Monday Night Football (ABC)  
6. 60 Minutes (CBS)  
7. N.Y.P.D. Blue (ABC)  
8. Murder, She Wrote (CBS)  
9. Friends (NBC)  
10. Roseanne (ABC)

**Popular Movies**
1. Batman Forever  
2. Apollo 13  
3. Pocahontas  
4. Casper  
5. Die Hard: With a Vengeance

For several centuries, people have debated whether human beings can spontaneously combust, or burst into flames without being ignited by an external source. Though the first known accounts of spontaneous human combustion (SHC) date all the way back to 1641, the phenomenon gained wider exposure in the 19th century after popular author Charles Dickens used it to kill off one of the characters in his novel “Bleak House.” When critics accused Dickens of legitimizing something that didn’t exist, he pointed to research showing 30 historical cases. More recently, cases of SHC have been suspected when police and fire department officials have found burned corpses with unscathed furniture around them. For instance, an Irish coroner ruled that spontaneous combustion caused the 2010 death of 76-year-old Michael Faherty, whose badly burned body was discovered near a fireplace in a room with virtually no fire damage.

Because the human body is composed mostly of water and its only highly flammable properties are fat tissue and methane gas, the possibility of SHC being an actual phenomenon seems remote. Many scientists dismiss the theory, arguing that an undetected flame source such as a match or cigarette is the real culprit in suspected cases. Typically, deceased victims are found close to a fire source, and evidence suggests that many of them accidentally set themselves on fire while smoking or trying to light a flame.

On the other hand, believers point to the fact that the human body has to reach a temperature of roughly 3,000 degrees in order to be reduced to ashes. Unless SHC were a genuine factor, it seems impossible that furniture would not burn as well. Proposed causes of the supposed phenomenon include bacteria, static electricity, obesity, stress and—most consistently—excessive consumption of alcohol, but none have been substantiated by science so far. One recent hypothesis comes from British biologist Brian J. Ford, who in August 2012 described his experiments with combustion in the magazine New Scientist. According to Ford, a buildup of acetone in the body (which can result from alcoholism, diabetes or a specific kind of diet) can lead to spontaneous combustion.