

All Out of Pretty

by Ingrid Palmer

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Synopsis



How do you know who to trust? Can you even trust yourself, your own instincts, and choices? Andrea, or "Bones" as her mom calls her, thinks of herself as smart, but intelligence only gets you so far and she finds herself nowhere near as smart or as tough as she thought.

"All Out of Pretty" is a gripping, thoughtful look at one girl's journey to figuring out what really matters to her and how to take care of herself in a world where there are no responsible adults for her to rely on. Do you use your looks or your brains? Your stubbornness or flexibility? How do you survive a drug-addict mother and her dealer boyfriend? Andrea's voice will pull you along from the first sentence of this emotional roller-coaster of a book.

Discussion Questions

1. Andrea begins her story by talking about how pretty her mother is. Beauty and its perils is a theme throughout the book. How is being pretty a good thing? How is it a bad thing? How does Andrea view it? Does her view of being pretty change over the course of the book? How does it differ at the beginning and at the end?
2. Another theme is being smart or stupid. Andrea prides herself on being a good student. Why is getting good grades so important to her? Is Andrea book smart or street smart? Or both? Give examples that show how she is or isn't smart about her choices.
3. Choices and decisions, whether they're good or bad, safe or dangerous, is also a theme. Make a list of the different choices Andrea makes throughout the book. Do you agree with her decisions? Why or why not?
4. How do you know who to trust? Can you even trust yourself, your own instincts, and choices? Andrea thinks of herself as smart, but she discovers that intelligence only gets you so far. She needs to ask other people for help, but doesn't reach out to any of the adults around her, to any of her friends. Why do you think Andrea does this? What holds her back?

5. Family values—especially the roles of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters—run throughout the story. Andrea tries to take care of Ayla, her mother, even though her mother doesn't take care of her. How does Andrea care for Ayla? Does Ayla ever care for Andrea? How does Gram care for both of them?
6. How do the adults in the book help Andrea? How do they hurt her? What roles do adults play in this story? What roles do kids play?
7. Why is the book called "All Out of Pretty"? What does that refer to? Do you think it's a fitting title? The book could have been called "Unbreakable." Would that be a better title? Why or why not?
8. Andrea thinks of herself as pretty, smart, and unbreakable. Is she all of those things? What incidents in the book prove her right in her opinion? Which prove her wrong? Which of these three characteristics is most important to her? Give evidence for your stand.
9. Andrea also considers herself to be a moral, good person, but she does immoral, unethical things, like sell drugs and steal. How does she justify these actions to herself? Is she a good person despite doing these things? Why or why not?
10. Is Andrea a strong or weak person? In some instances, she stands up for herself and her friends without hesitation. But other times, she cowers and backs down. List some scenes from the book when Andrea acts strong, and some when she acts weak. What do you think you would do in similar situations? Does it take a stronger person to endure a bad situation, or to run away from it?
11. What is the bond between a mother and a daughter, despite challenges like addiction and neglect? Why do people stay in toxic relationships? Why does Andrea stay with Ayla? What would you do if there was only one person left in the world that you were tied to—and that person was pulling you into dangerous situations?
12. When Brick learns Andrea is in trouble, he wants to help her but doesn't know how. How do his decisions affect Andrea? What different choices could he have made and what do you think the outcomes would have been? How would you save someone who didn't want your help?
13. When Andrea learns the truth about her father, she feels anger, guilt, and confusion. How does having a parent that is a criminal affect a person's identity and self-worth? How do Andrea's feelings about her father—and her mother—change throughout the book?
14. Brick's feelings for his father are also confused. How do you forgive someone who has done something so unforgivable? Should Brick talk to his father or shut him out? What would you do? Do Brick's feelings toward his father change throughout the book? Do we get a sense of what his father means to him?
15. There's a parallel between Brick's parents and Andrea's, though it's never spelled out. Ayla is a drug addict and Brick's father drinks too much. How do these parental behaviors affect their kids? What does it cost them?

16. What does keeping secrets do to a person over time? Why does Andrea choose to keep her secrets? Do you agree with her reasoning? Is it possible to have authentic relationships and grow close to others if you are never truly honest with them?