

# READING GROUP GUIDE

## THE ART OF CRASH LANDING

A NOVEL

MELISSA  
DECARLO

1. Early on in the book it becomes clear that Mattie has a long history of making bad decisions. Have any other characters in the book made what seem like self-destructive choices in their lives? How have those choices shaped present circumstances?
2. Queeg loves his aphorisms, and as much as Mattie teases him about them, it's clear that she loves them too. How about you? Do you have some favorite quotes?
3. Even though Queeg was only Mattie's stepfather for three years, it's obvious they're still close. Why do you think Mattie maintained a close relationship with Queeg? Are there relationships from your past that you're surprised you've maintained? Some you're surprised you've let go?
4. Even taking into account her many flaws, Mattie is often harder on herself than she deserves. Why do you think she does that? Do you think having a negative self image is more common problem for women than men? Why or why not?
5. Part of the reason Mattie finds Tawny annoying is how much the girl reminds Mattie of herself as a teenager. How do you think being around Mattie that summer will influence Tawny in the future? If you could meet your teenaged self, what advice would you give?
6. How is Mattie letting her past steer her present course through life? Are any of the other characters doing the same thing? Are there any times in your life you've caught yourself giving too much power to your past?
7. What do you think about Luke? Why do you suppose he goes out of his way to be kind to Mattie?
8. Even thirty-five years later, Karleen still harbors strong feelings about Genie. Why do you think the dynamic between them changes when Genie goes off to college? How does that reflect the evolution of friendships over time? Did you have a close friend when you were growing up? Are you still in touch?
9. As she investigates her mother's history, Mattie's own past and her relationship with her mother are revealed one piece at a time. As you progressed through the book, how did your feelings toward Mattie change? What about your feelings toward her mother?
10. How do you think JJ's experiences shaped him into the man he became?
11. The two settings in the book are the Florida panhandle with its beaches and seagulls, and a small town in Oklahoma with its wind and storms. Do you think the settings were important to the story? Why or why not?
12. What was the emotional significance of the old Malibu to Genie and to Mattie? Do you have anything you've held onto longer than you should because of the memories tied to it? What would it take for you to let it go?
13. The ability or inability to let go of guilt and move on with life is a recurring theme in this novel. What are some of the characters whose stories reflect this theme, and how did they deal with (or not deal with) their guilt? How common is it in real life for people to harbor guilt that holds them back from realizing their potential?
14. If could check back in with Mattie a year after the book's ending, what do you think you'd find? What do you wish you'd find? Are the answers to those two questions the same or different?