



Reader's Guide

Do not read these discussion points before reading the novel, unless you really hate surprises and really love spoilers!

Psssst! Would it be even more fun to discuss *A Stone's Throw* with the author? Invite her to your book club, library, or book store. Reach out: books@alidawinternheimer.com.

Motherhood and the idea of women's lineages or communities is at the heart of this story.

- How did you connect to the theme of motherhood?
- Is there one woman's story that really resonated with you?

Women come to life out of a painting!

- How fun is that?
- What did you enjoy most about the spirit women?

Simona and Gemma begin and end their stories at very different places.

- How do you feel about them as people at the beginning of the story?
- How do you feel about them at the end of the story?
- If you had a favorite, did your feelings shift over the course of their journeys?



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At the beginning of the book, Peter may seem like “just” the husband or “just” the lover. His marriage is failing while a new relationship is blooming.

He has his own challenging decisions to make, caught between betraying one woman and being true to the other, while loving them both.

- How do you feel about Peter?
- Do you like him more or less over the course the novel? Why? What changed in your understanding of him?

A Stone's Throw opens with Simona addressing the news that she is pregnant, a situation with a big impact on her life whatever she decides. Placed at a crossroads, her choice shapes the rest of her life.

Unplanned is not necessarily unwanted, as we see in A Stone's Throw. Statistics show that unplanned pregnancies in the U.S. have declined since the late 1990s, but remain between 20% and 40%, varying state to state.

- How do you feel about Simon's choice?
- Have you or someone you know experienced an unplanned pregnancy? How did it change the mother's and father's life course?

Gemma is suffering the devastating losses of miscarriage and a severe neural tube birth defect, anencephaly. Gemma feels extremely isolated in her experience.



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Approximately 10% to 20% of pregnancies end in miscarriage, and the rate is likely higher due to the early stage of pregnancy at which miscarriage occurs. About 3% of babies are born with a birth defect in the U.S. (according to the March of Dimes), while the rate of anencephaly worldwide is 5.1 - 8.3 per ten thousand births (according to Reproductive Health*).

- How did you feel reading her storyline? Did it, perhaps, help you feel less alone or more understood if you've experienced pregnancy loss? Did it help you have more understanding for the women and their partners who experience this loss?
- Discuss the toll these losses and Gemma's grief take on her and Peter's marriage.

Each of these characters finds themselves at a turning point, when they must decide what they truly want and how to live the rest of their lives.

- What choice do each of them face and how do you feel about their decisions?
- Were you surprised by any of their actions?
- Do you think Peter would have chosen Simona if she weren't pregnant?
- Do you think Gemma should have said yes when Peter came home to her?

The author, Alida Winternheimer, experienced an unplanned pregnancy and loss caused by anencephaly in her twenties. Simona and Gemma's experiences are their own and wholly different from the author's. However, she did draw on her experience, understanding, and grief to write their stories.

- Are you surprised to learn the author has personal experience with this subject? Why or why not?
- How important is experience to authenticity in writing fiction, do you think?



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If you would like to read Alida's story, she tells it, a lot of years after writing A Stone's Throw, in an essay titled, "The Sun Still Shines on the Worst Day of Your Life." It is published in Under the Sun literary journal of creative nonfiction and is a notable in Best American Essays, 2022. You can read it and other short pieces at www.alidawinternheimer.com/read.

***Love science?**

Overall estimate of the prevalence, incidence and attenuation of anencephaly worldwide is 5.1 - 8.3 per ten thousand births. Anencephaly is a severe form of neural tube defect or NTD.

"Though being significantly various in different geographical areas, the incidence of [all] NTD is generally around 1 in 1000 live births (NTD affects about 1 in 1000 live births on average, however this varies greatly by area.). Pathologically, neural tube defects vary from a small, uncomplicated opening in the posterior canal of the vertebrae to the failure of the entire neural tube to close, leading to the most severe type of defect that is craniorachischisis. The most recurring cases include anencephaly, spina bifida, and encephalocele."

Nader Salari, et al. "Global prevalence of congenital anencephaly: a comprehensive systematic review and meta-analysis." *Reprod. Health.* 2022; 19: 201. Published online 2022 Oct 17. Retrieved 2024 Oct. 7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9575217/>

