

***THE BURNING SIDE* READING GROUP GUIDE**

1. What do you think might have been different if the fire hadn't happened?
2. Leo thinks, "Ideals can be the sparks of love, and for us they were." How does their idealism help Leo and April? How does it hurt them?
3. Deb is a generous caretaker, but she has trouble letting others help her. Why do you think this is common for caretakers? How does Deb grow throughout the novel?
4. Leo thinks, "I don't know what to do with that—with a woman who both bandages and burns." He wants April to be wrong or right, good or bad, but she is both. What outcomes do you notice when someone ignores the strengths or weaknesses of a loved one?
5. April thinks, "It's hard to have a shift of heart beside someone who is so familiar with it." How does it speak to the difficulty of change in a long relationship?
6. Why do you think Leo starts searching for his parents when he does?
7. What were the different reactions of the three siblings when it came to genetic testing for early-onset Alzheimer's? Did you understand one of them more than the others?
8. When we see Leo as a child, the narrator says, "He carries the burden of the born: the want of his parents, whoever they are." How does Leo's understanding of his parents shift throughout the book? In what ways does this cause him to wrestle with his own identity?
9. How did you feel about Billy giving Deb the pills? How did you feel when she dumped them?
10. What blame does Leo carry that isn't his? What blame that is his does he struggle to admit? Are these connected?
11. In April's journey with postpartum depression, she thinks, "Unhappiness is a privilege I have not earned." Why does she think that, and how does this line of thought work against her?
12. April thinks, "The question of forgiveness forces us to look at the wound." How does forgiveness differ from ignoring a problem?
13. What factors contribute to Leo changing his mind about the divorce? What about April?
14. Which character did you relate to most? Least?
15. How does memory vs. forgetfulness impact not only Deb and Billy, but also April and Leo?
16. Leo thinks, "But there aren't answers, I realize. There are stories." Have you ever sat down with a parent, grandparent, aunt/uncle, mentor and asked about their story? Or with children, nieces, nephews to share your story? If so, how did it impact you? How did it impact them?

