



Discussion Questions for BLACK WIDOW by Leslie Gray Streeter

- 1) "Black Widow" is a memoir about a very sad thing that also uses a lot of humor. Have you seen this used in other memoirs about tragedy and death? Was it effective?
- 2) Can you think about a difficult time in your life that humor carried you through? Did that help you relate to Leslie's story?
- 3) Grief is a very common, universal experience that most of us will be touched by. Why is it so hard to talk about it? Talk about a time of grieving in your own life? Was it hard to talk about with other people? Did they want you to talk about it more or less? What might make that discussion easier?

- 4) "Black Widow" is not only a memoir of grief, but a love story. How important was getting to know Scott to your understanding of Leslie's loss of him?
- 5) Scott and Leslie were raised in the same city but are from different racial and religious backgrounds. Discuss the effect of those differences on their relationship. How did your relationship to those communities effect you as you read their story?
- 6) In Chapter 3, Leslie writes about her perspective on being a black woman in America, and her experience that this means most things are not specifically tailored to you, not out of malice but because you simply weren't thought of. What did that mean to you? Discuss a time in your own life that you were thrown into a social, business or educational situation where it was clear that the creators weren't expecting people like you?
- 7) Another theme is Leslie's difficulty with telling her young son about his father's death. Why do you think this was so difficult? Talk about a time in your life that you found it hard to discuss something necessary but painful with a loved one. How did you do it, how long did it take you, and why did you finally do it when you did?
- 8) Leslie talks about how, in the beginning of her grief, that she coped by drinking and eating too much. What did you think of her choices? Were you able to relate personally?
 - a. Eventually Leslie decides that she needs to be healthier do that her son has one functional and thriving parent. What did you think of her attempts at transformation? Was it significant that she had to ask for help? Talk about a time in your life that you had to ask for help.
- 9) Leslie writes about her "village," including her friends and family who rally to her side in the time after Scott's death, and during the first year of her widowhood. Talk about the importance of those people to the story. Did one stick out? Talk about the importance of support in difficult personal situations.
- 10) A reader of Leslie's newspaper column writes to suggest that her divorce is worse than widowhood. What did you think of that? Do you agree? Why or why not?
- 11) What place do you think that race, gender, class and religion play in this story? How different would Leslie's story be if, for instance, she and her partner shared the same race, religion or gender? Why is it important to explore common experiences like marriage, loss and parenthood from different perspectives?
- 12) Leslie is adamant about protecting the specific identity of Brooks' birth parents and the specifics of the circumstances that made him available for foster care, because she says that isn't her story to tell. Did that surprise you? Did it make sense? Did not having those specifics make it harder to invest in the story?
- 13) The book ends with Leslie having a conversation in her head with Scott during Brooks' adoption. What did you think of the choice to include that? Talk about a time in your life that you've imagined talking to late loved ones, particularly in occasions you can imagine them having been a part of?