



With Child -- by Laurie R. King Reader's Discussion Guide

1. When we first met Kate Martinelli, in **A Grave Talent**, she had such strong defenses that she even hid behind a nickname (Casey, for K.C.) instead of using her own identity. Since then, she has become increasingly vulnerable and open. Do you feel that this side of her reveals new weaknesses, or does it ultimately make her stronger?
2. In the beginning of the book, we meet Kate just after Lee has left her, perhaps for good, in a particularly brutal and selfish fashion. Do you see any justification for Lee's behavior? If you were Kate, and Lee came back to you in the middle of an incredibly hard case, how would you react?
3. During an argument, Lee tells Kate that she still wants a baby, despite her physical disabilities. What does having a child represent to Lee, and to Kate? How do you think this development affects Kate's relationship with Jules and her reaction to Jules' disappearance?
4. Kate's personality goes through some major changes after Lee's departure: she is more open about herself as a lesbian, she befriends Jules, she opens up in her relationship with her partner Al. Has Lee's absence freed her?
5. Children form the backbone of this book and the community it describes. In what ways do they serve to bring people together – or drive them apart? How does this relate to the title of the novel?
6. *With Child* deals with the difficult subjects of child homelessness, abuse, and abduction. How do you feel when a novel shows children in peril? What advantages does the author gain in exploring the young psyche through the characters of Jules and Dio? What do they bring to the narrative that would not be possible with adult protagonists?
7. Jules tells Kate that the main definition of *family* is “all of the relations and servants who live together under one roof,” with “two adults and their kids” coming a distant fifth. How do we see family defined throughout the book, particularly in Jules' search for an idealized father figure? Does your own sense of family depend on blood ties? How has it changed since you were Jules' age?
8. *With Child* is a dark story, but it holds touches of humor as well, from Kate's mocking of the two young cops to Jules' t-shirts. Is humor appropriate here? How does the author use it, in pacing and in developing her characters?
9. The powerful need of children for a family makes them easy prey for exploitation by adults or street gangs. Two characters in the book, Grace Kokumah of the Haight/Love Shelter and the Fagin-type Weldon Reynolds, recognize the vulnerability of “lost children” and use it to offer very different kinds of protection and a sense of belonging. Can you see any way we as a society can inoculate children against this vulnerability?

10. The caring instinct plays a pivotal role in this novel: parental and familial, caring for an invalid, or a community gathering to support one of its own. Where else do we see examples of care or caretaking in this story? Are they all positive? In your opinion, when does caring become overbearing, or protectiveness become dangerous?
11. Kate describes Jules' evolution from "a prig with a big vocabulary" into "a human being, as close to being a normal kid as you can get with a brain like hers." Do you see parallels between Jules' emotional growth and Kate's? How do their physical appearances mirror that process?
12. After Kate is injured, both emotionally and physically, she is surprised to find her community rallying around her, supporting her in ways she had not expected. Why is she surprised? How does this expansion of her support circle both mirror and encourage the emotional growth we see in this book? Have you ever found sources of support you didn't expect during times of need?
13. Open guilt permeates the story: Kate's guilt over Lee's injury, Jules' guilt that she didn't do more for Dio, Kate's permitting Jules to disappear, Lee's regret over causing Kate pain. Are there hidden wells of guilt as well, in Jani's violent condemnation of Kate and in Jules' hesitation to escape the father she has actively sought out?