

EGMONT

USA

family

by Micol Ostow

Ages: 14 up

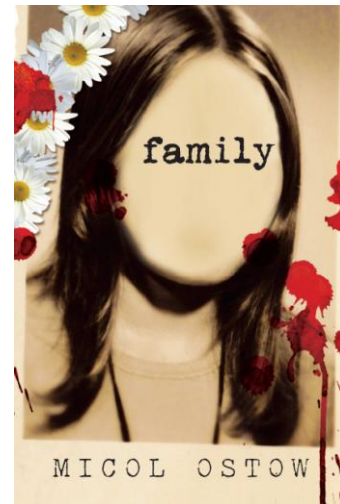
Summary:

On the surface, it is a day like any other when seventeen-year-old Melinda Jensen hits the road for San Francisco, leaving behind her fractured home life and constant assault on her self-esteem. Henry is the handsome, charismatic man who comes upon her, collapsed on a park bench, and offers love, a bright new consciousness, and—best of all—a family. One that will embrace her and give her love. Because family is what Mel has never really had. And this new family, Henry’s family, shares everything. They share the chores, their bodies, and their beliefs. And if Mel truly wants to belong, she will share in everything they do. No matter what the family does, or how far they go.

Told in episodic verse, *family* is a fictionalized exploration of cult dynamics, loosely based on the Manson Family murders of 1969. It is an unflinching look at people who are born broken, and the myriad ways in which they try, over and over, to make themselves whole again.

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you know about Charles Manson and his followers? Research their stories, their background. How are the characters in the book similar? How are they different?
2. Why do you think Mel agrees to go with Henry? Why does she trust him? What is it about him she finds appealing?
3. Why do you think the author chose to capitalize the word *He* when Mel is referring to Henry? What do you think she was hoping to convey by using this style of formatting?
4. The phrase “you wouldn’t believe the sorts of things that some people throw away” is repeated throughout the story. Discuss the repetition of this statement and the multiple meanings it comes to have as the story progresses.
5. What do you think Mel means when she says Shelly is her “inside out.” (pg. 27) Describe the relationship between the two girls. What do you make of this friendship? What do you think binds them together?



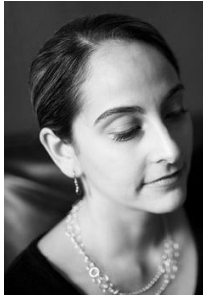
family

6. Why does Henry make Mel and the others leave their personal effects when they get to the ranch? What do you think he is trying to achieve by doing this? Does he succeed? Why or why not?
7. Why does Mel let the new girl, Angela, keep her personal belongings? What does this action tell you about Mel?
8. Throughout the story, the idea of family comes to mean multiple things to Mel. What does family mean to you?
9. Why do you think the author heads the vignette in the third part of the story with numbers instead of titles? What do you think this switch signifies?
10. In the end, why does Mel free the singer? Why is she not fully taken in the way the others are?

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About the Author: Micol Ostow is the author of *Emily Goldberg Learns to Salsa*, a New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age, and *So Punk Rock (and Other Ways to Disappoint Your Mother)*. She lives in New York City.

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