

Reading Guide Questions for A Field Guide to Burying Your Parents

1. The author has chosen a Ryan Adams lyric to open the book—what expectations does this quote set for you, and how does the book meet or differ from those expectations?
2. The four Hawkes children are very different personalities—which can you most relate to? Is that one the most sympathetic? Do you think the Narnia comparison is a fair one? Do you think the siblings rely on this mythology about themselves and does that inform their behavior?
3. After Evelyn died, all four Hawkes children made extreme life choices that changed the trajectory of their lives. What do you think propelled them to do this? Why do you think they couldn't comfort each other in their most dire time of need?
4. What's the significance of the song (*I Shall be Released* by Bob Dylan) Grace plays at her mother's funeral?
5. Why has Abigail lionized Ray all these years? Do all single parents face their children's fantasy of what it would have been like to be raised by the absent parent?
6. Grace has never previously met her nephew and niece Mateo and Emilygrae. What effect does their existence have on the family as a whole? On Abigail? On Grace? On the family as a whole?
7. Why is regaining Evie's trust so crucial to Grace? What kind of aunt do you think she wants to be, and does she accomplish this by the book's end?
8. When John tells Grace that he loves her in Ray's office, she answers, "I know." Why is this actually more earth shattering for her than simply saying that she loves him back? (Besides the obvious Han Solo shout out.)
9. Did Grace's running away from her family help her at all? Did it help anyone? Why do we run from situations in our own lives? Does it ever help?

10. What would make someone act the way Connie Noonan does in the novel? Is there any circumstance where her behavior would be anything but despicable? Is there any redemption for a person like this?
11. Why is Huston still single? Are his duties as father to his fellow siblings encroaching on his own personal life?
12. Why do you think no one can tell Leo no? Has it served him well over the years or has it infantilized him to his own detriment? Is this a common practice with the “baby of the family?”
13. Abigail and Manny’s marriage seems to defy all odds – why is she the only happily married Hawkes? ?
14. Why do we as children hesitate to ask our parents questions about their lives before they had us? Why do we only think to ask them these questions when it’s too late? If you were able to ask your parents anything, what would it be?
15. Why is it such a cosmic shift when you finally see your parents as real people and not Gods? How does the book’s title play into this phenomenon?
16. Do you think Evelyn ever really moved on from Ray? Is Grace right – that the kids were simply collateral damage of their ill-advised love affair?
17. If Evelyn had lived – what role would she have played in Ray’s redemption?
18. What does ‘happily ever after’ mean to each of the Hawkes clan? What chance do you think each of them have of attaining that happily ever after?