

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) What do you think it means to be kind? What does Ivy think it means to be kind, and does her definition of kindness change throughout the book? Do you think it's possible for a person to be *too* kind? Why or why not?
- 2.) Find a specific passage in the book that reveals something Ivy loves about baking. Why does baking bring Ivy so much joy? What hobbies or activities bring you the most joy?
- 3.) At various points in the novel, Ivy thinks different people are `downbythebay5@mailme.com`. Who did you think was emailing her and why? Did you notice any clues about the emailer's identity that Ivy missed?
- 4.) There's a framed quote on Ivy's mom's wall that says, "Wherever you go, there you are." This is a quote that can be interpreted in different ways. What does Ivy think it means? What do *you* think it means? Do you believe people stay the same deep down, no matter what happens? Or do you think people sometimes change in big, lasting ways? Have *you* changed in any big, lasting ways?
- 5.) Ivy recalls that her friendship with Kyra used to "make the whole world feel bigger and more exciting and full of wonder," but now being with Kyra usually makes her feel "smaller" (46). What are some things that Kyra says or does that make Ivy feel smaller? Have you ever had a friendship that used to make you feel good but then eventually didn't anymore? What did you do?
- 6.) Lila says she's tired of people telling her that she can choose to be happy, because "That's not how emotions work" (60). What does Ivy learn throughout the novel about how emotions work? Can you think of anything *you* have learned, based on your own experiences, about how emotions work or how to handle difficult emotions?
- 7.) Kyra tells Ivy, "Sometimes you're so worried about being nice that you're not that good a friend" (66). How does Ivy's desire to be kind get in the way of her desire to be a good friend? What does Ivy learn by the end of the book about what it means to be a good friend? Which other characters are good friends to Ivy?
- 8.) Why did Ivy decide not to play on the middle school soccer team after she tried joining last year? Do you think she made the right decision? What other things does Ivy decide not to do for similar reasons? Have you ever decided not to pursue an activity you had some interest in, and do you regret that choice at all?
- 9.) Josh asks Ivy to break a big rule to help him with his take-home test, but before that big request, he says and asks for other things that make Ivy uncomfortable. Can you find examples of things Josh says or does that *foreshadow* (or hint) that he will eventually put Ivy into a very bad situation? Do you have any sympathy for Josh and the way he treats Ivy? Why or why not?
- 10.) Nana encourages Ivy to "embrace all the parts of herself" including her connection to Judaism (127). Are there any parts of your identity, family history, or culture that you'd like to embrace more fully? What are some ways you could do that?
- 11.) Ivy has a hard time admitting when she is struggling because she knows that other people are dealing with harder circumstances than she is. Have you ever felt that you "shouldn't" be sad because other people are suffering more? What would you say to Ivy or to someone else who believes they don't have a right to be unhappy because they are lucky compared to others?

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- 12.) Ivy realizes that the words “good” and “complicated” are so vague that they don’t really mean anything, and Lila points out that the phrase “it’s complicated” is usually code for “I don’t want to talk about this.” Can you think of any other vague, “nothing” words like “good” and “complicated”? Why do people sometimes use words or phrases like these instead of telling the full truth?
- 13.) Ivy often pushes aside her negative thoughts and feelings, and sometimes those thoughts and feelings burst out. Look at a specific scene when Ivy’s emotions burst out. What pushes her past her breaking point in this moment? Does she mean the words she says when she lashes out? What could she have done to communicate, work through, or release some of her feelings before this moment? Have you ever had a moment when you’ve snapped in a similar way? How did you feel afterwards, and what did you learn from that experience?
- 14.) Ivy’s mom tells her, “Everybody has moments they’re not proud of. We all say things we don’t mean and hurt other people. It’s awful, but it’s part of being human” (203). Think about the big and small ways that all the characters—including the grownups—mess up and cause pain to others, even when they don’t mean to. What kinds of mistakes do Ivy, her friends, and her family members make, and how do they try to repair or move on from them? What are some mistakes you have made in your own life, and how have you repaired or moved on from them?
- 15.) Ivy often feels like her parents are keeping secrets from her. What are some things adults don’t tell her right away, and why do they keep these things from her? Have you ever felt like adults are keeping information from you? How did that make you feel?
- 16.) Ivy worries that if she isn’t exceptionally kind, then she doesn’t have a “thing.” Have you ever felt pressure to find a “thing” that makes you stand out? What can go wrong if people are too focused on having one main “thing” that they love and do well?
- 17.) Ivy feels distant from Mom and Will throughout much of the novel, and she’s afraid their relationships will never go back to normal. But by the end, she thinks it might not be a bad thing if their relationships change a little bit. What does Ivy learn about the kind of sister and daughter she wants to be? In what ways might her relationships with Mom, Will, Dad, and Leo be different after the book ends?
- 18.) A *symbol* is a significant object that takes on layers of meaning. Ivy’s story includes several symbols, including her dad’s very clean car, Will’s homemade stress balls, and the birthday cake Ivy makes for Sydney. In what ways are these objects important? What do they reveal about Ivy or about other characters? Do you see any other symbols in the book?
- 19.) Josh and Blake give nicknames to Ivy, Peyton, and other characters, and Kyra and the anonymous emailer call Ivy “Saint Ivy.” Sometimes nicknames make people feel special and included, and other times they make people feel uncomfortable or hurt. How does Ivy feel about her nicknames throughout the book, and why does she say she is just “regular Ivy” by the end? Have people ever called you a nickname, and if so did you like it? Why or why not?
- 20.) At the very end of the book, Ivy thinks about what she believes in: “At least for that moment, [...] Ivy believed in herself, and Lila, and complicated families, and baking, and kindness—even imperfect, not-every-second kindness like hers” (329). What would you include in your own list of things and people you believe in right at this moment?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

- *Saint Ivy* is written in close third-person point of view. That means that even though Ivy isn't directly telling the reader her story using the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my*, the narrative follows her very closely, revealing her inner thoughts and feelings. The third-person narration is limited to Ivy's thoughts and feelings, so readers can often infer other characters' emotions, but we only know Ivy's perspective for sure. Think of another character in the novel whose perspective might be interesting and write a scene from that person's point of view. You can choose to write about an event that happens in the book and consider how another character might experience it, or you can write about an event that isn't included in the book. Feel free to use third or first-person point of view...or try out both!
- When the novel ends, Ivy is looking forward to trying many new things and getting to know many new people. Choose something that you think Ivy will do after the final chapter of the book, and write your own scene showing what happens.
- A simile is a comparison between two things that are not literally the same but are similar in important ways. Similes always use the words "like" or "as." *Saint Ivy* includes a lot of similes, and many of them compare something Ivy feels or notices to something related to baking. Here are a few examples:
 - "A general sense of uneasiness hit Ivy like the rush of heat when Nana opened her oven, but the pieces didn't click into place" (11).
 - "Maybe she acted angry and annoyed with everything because she didn't want her sad, private feelings oozing out like rugelach filling" (65).
 - "Thoughts whirred around in Ivy's brain like Nana's mixer on the highest setting" (163).

See if you can find any other baking-related similes in the novel. Then write your own story with your own main character, and try to incorporate character-specific similes that relate to things your character knows well and is passionate about. You can also use metaphors, which are like similes except that they do not use the words "like" or "as."

BAKING

- Try making one of the pastries Ivy bakes! Here are some yummy recipes to choose from.
 - Brookies from The Recipe Critic: <https://therecipecritic.com/brookies-cookies>
 - Rugelach from NY Times Cooking: <https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1015634-rugelach>
 - Rugelach from Sally's Baking Addiction: <https://sallysbakingaddiction.com/how-to-make-rugelach-cookies>
 - German Chocolate Cake from Barbara Bakes: <https://www.barbarabakes.com/easy-german-chocolate-cake>
 - Apple Cake from Smitten Kitchen: <https://smittenkitchen.com/2008/09/moms-apple-cake>
- Ask a family member to teach you how to make one of their favorite meals or desserts, as Ivy does with Nana. Copy out the recipe so you'll always have it, and ask about where the recipe came from, when and how they learned it, and any special tips they have.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Try the "authentic research" assignment Ms. Ramos gives Ivy. Choose something you're genuinely interested in—a kind of food, a sport, a place, a person, an event...anything you want! Do some research (online, in books, and/or by talking to people) to find out everything you can. Then think of a creative way to share what you find with other people.
- Ivy lives in a neighborhood in Philadelphia where many old homes are being torn down and new construction is springing up. Her neighborhood appears to be going through a process called *gentrification*. Do some research to find out about what gentrification is and what effects it has on people and places. You could also read other novels that delve into gentrification in more depth, such as *The Epic Fall of Arturo Zamora* by Pablo Cartaya, *Take Back the Block* by Crystal D. Giles, or *Right as Rain* by Lindsey Stoddard.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

- The first anonymous email says that people don't always say thank you for things that really impact them. Think about something someone has done that's made a positive impact on you. Write a thank you note or email to let the person know why you appreciate them and their actions. (But you probably want to sign your message instead of keeping it anonymous!)
- Picture books can be great resources for opening up conversations about complex topics such as kindness. Read and discuss any of the picture books on the Happily Ever Elephants list of Books About Kindness to Help You Cultivate Compassion in Kids: (<https://happilyeverelephants.com/home/kids-books-about-kindness>). As an extension, write and illustrate your own picture book that explores what you think it means to be kind.
- Will learns to make stress balls to help manage his worries and frustrations. You can make your own stress ball by following the instructions on The Spruce Crafts site: (<https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/how-to-make-a-stress-ball-1244219>).
- Ivy has a hard time talking to her friends about what's going on with the surrogacy. Imagine you have a friend who isn't opening up about something you know they're dealing with. Brainstorm a list of things you could say to let the person know you're there for them if they want to talk, or that you could help them find the right grown-up to talk to.

ART

- Ivy describes Lila's sketch of Josh at the soccer game this way: "She'd stretched out the space between Josh and the next closest kid, making Josh look even more isolated than he was, and she'd captured how everybody else on the bench was looking up, watching the game, but Josh's head hung low, studying the screen of his phone. The picture made Ivy feel so sad for Josh that she had to look away" (86). Create your own drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, or other piece of art that captures a feeling the way Lila's sketch does. You could try to capture loneliness, excitement, joy, worry, or any other emotion that interests you. Think about what you can emphasize to make that emotion come across.

SAINT IVY

KIND AT ALL COSTS

By Laurie Morrison

PRAISE

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

*“I loved this wise, warm, and utterly relatable story about kindness—a topic that feels especially timely. Once again, Laurie Morrison has created a complex, authentic character readers will eagerly embrace.” —Barbara Dee, author of *Maybe He Just Likes You* and *My Life in the Fish Tank**

*“A truly memorable novel that makes the sometimes quiet and unasked questions of growing up and figuring yourself out feel big and bold and heart-shifting and profound. Part page-turning mystery, part emotional character study, I loved every poignant, intimate, and wise page. And I loved Ivy and her deeply relatable journey most of all.” —Corey Ann Haydu, author of *Eventown* and *One Jar of Magic**

*“Morrison has crafted a beautifully triumphant story. It is layered, warm, and sweet, just like the perfectly imperfect Ivy herself.” —Carrie Firestone, author of *Dress Coded**

*“Feelings, life, and people are allowed to be complicated in beautiful ways in this page-turner.”
—Kirkus Reviews*

*“A keenly observed portrait of a girl who goes way overboard on a good thing.” —Bulletin of the
Center for Children’s Books*

*“The lively narrative projects an authentic middle school voice and the Philadelphia setting is vivid, populated by nuanced characters and situations... Relatable realistic fiction for upper elementary and middle school readers navigating friendships, boundaries, and identity, with appeal for fans of similarly themed stories such as *Varian Johnson’s Twins*, *Shannon Hale’s Real Friends*, and *Celia C. Pérez’s Strange Birds*.” —School Library Journal*

