

READING GROUP GUIDE

MAGGIE TERRY by Sarah Schulman

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1. Schulman sets her novel in the summer of 2017, making specific references to the president and to the political chaos in the United States. What connections do you see between the current political turmoil and Maggie's unfolding personal crisis?
2. Schulman repeatedly draws attention to Maggie's blond hair and blue eyes. How do Maggie's looks affect the way people respond to her? How does Maggie play with and against people's expectations of her based on her appearance?
3. Maggie judges people quickly—she says that “some people are a surprise, but not everyone” (77). For instance, when she meets her coworkers at the private detective agency, she quickly determines how each of them fits into the office environment, and at AA meetings, she assesses other attendees as a police officer would. How does this quality both help and hurt her in her personal and professional life?
4. The neighborhood around Maggie's apartment in Manhattan is rapidly gentrifying. How does this ever-shifting landscape influence her mental state? How is Maggie complicit in the gentrification process? How does she fit, or fail to fit, into the new standards of the gentrified neighborhood?
5. Maggie remembers what it was like to make it as a “professional in a man's field” (190). What does it mean for women to “make it” in careers typically defined for men, especially one like police work? When it comes to institutions that are historically male-dominated, do you think it is possible to reconstruct the system from the inside?
6. Frances's decision to kick Maggie out and prevent her from seeing their daughter, Alina, seems justified at the beginning of the book. However, as we learn more about Frances, her affair with Maritza, and her drinking, it seems she bears some responsibility for the breakup of her and Maggie's marriage. Why is it so easy for Frances to pin all the blame on Maggie?
7. Throughout the novel, Maggie attempts to develop new habits to replace her old addictive ones. She buys mint tea at the deli and tries to eat some of the healthy options Nick has added to his stock. How does Schulman expose the difficulty of sobriety? How does Maggie's struggle to rebuild her life relate to the chaos around her, both in the political world and in her personal struggle with the Nelson Ashford shooting?



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8. Craig, Maggie's partner at the private detective agency, consistently makes space for Maggie's meetings and needles her about timeliness and partner etiquette. How would you describe Craig's behavior toward Maggie? What is he trying to get her to do?
9. Maggie spends most of her time in AA/NA meetings listening to her fellow addicts. What does Maggie learn from these people by listening so intently? What does she get out of these meetings, besides a strict routine?
10. The novel's mystery wraps up quickly once Maggie figures out Lucy Horne's story. What elements of Maggie's journey throughout the book allow her to put together the pieces? What do you think Schulman is trying to say with the speed of this resolution? How does the ending play with our expectations of noir and detective novels?
11. Why does Maggie decide to help the Ashford family? Why was she on Julio Figueroa's side for so long, and what changed her mind? As a former police officer, what kind of help can she provide to Nelson Ashford's mother? Are there limits to Maggie's ability to help in this situation?

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