

Discussion Questions: Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper

1. There are many themes in this book: how people cope with loss, how hard it is to get out of our own safety zones, self discovery, family and friendship relationships, secrets in a marriage, etc. Which themes resonated with you the most? Comment.
2. A book club discussion about a novel should include answering these questions: Is the book well-written?, Does it have an interesting plot? and are the characters well developed? How would you answer these questions?
3. Arthur encounters many people on his travels including tiger-crazy Lord Graystock, young homeless man Mike, Sylvie the French wedding boutique owner, Bernadette the busybody neighbor, caring daughter Lucy, illegal immigrant Sebastian, novelist Francois de Chauffant and Indian doctor Mr. Mehra. Which character that Arthur met did you like the most and why? The least and why?
4. When someone rings his doorbell, Arthur often pretends not to be at home. 'He screwed his eyes shut and pretended he was a statue in the garden of a stately home.' Why do you think he does this? Is it something you might do?
5. How we mourn and how difficult it is to break out of our routines and open up our minds and hearts to new possibilities is a major theme of the book. If you were in Arthur's situation, bereaved after a long marriage, would you also devise strategies and routines to get you through the days? What changed for him? Generally, do you think there is a difference between the way men and women mourn? Is there a difference in this as we age?
6. As we grow older, we become more aware of the challenge to communicate with our family members and to know what is in their hearts. Arthur appears to be a very decent man who has grown estranged from his own children. What caused that estrangement and what changes does he make to work on the relationship with his children? Comment on the first sentence.
7. Bernadette looks after her 'lost causes' with home-cooked food? Using food to communicate our "caring" is common. Why do you think she does this? Do you ever use food as a way of looking after yourself, or others?
8. Arthur comes out of his comfort zone by travelling to London, Paris and India. How did his experiences traveling to other countries match your own experiences in travel? What life lessons do you think that travel out of your comfort zone has enriched your life? How are those travel experiences different as you age?
9. What would you say is, ultimately, the most important thing that Arthur discovers about Miriam? About himself? About their life together?
10. Which is your favorite story behind the charms – heart, paint palette, ring, book, tiger, elephant, thimble and flower – and why?
11. Young homeless man, Mike, tells Arthur, 'those charms might bring you luck.' What is your own lucky charm, and what luck has it brought you? What would be on your charm bracelet and why?