

MISSING PIECES

by *New York Times* bestselling author

HEATHER GUDENKAUF

Book Club Discussion Guide



www.HeatherGudenkauf.com

Dear Readers,

Thank you for selecting *MISSING PIECES* for your book club discussion. I love talking books with readers and would be honored to join your discussion via Skype. Contact me at heather@heathergudenkauf for details.



Photo Credit: Morgan Hawthorne

Sarah Quinlan's husband, Jack, has been haunted for decades by the untimely death of his mother when he was just a teenager. The case rocked the small farm town of Penny Gate, Iowa, where Jack was raised, and for years Jack avoided returning home. But when his beloved aunt Julia is in an accident, Jack and Sarah are forced to confront the past that they have long evaded. Upon arriving in Penny Gate, Sarah and Jack are welcomed by the family Jack left behind all those years ago—barely a trace of the wounds that had once devastated them all. But as facts about Julia's accident begin to surface, Sarah realizes that nothing about the Quinlans is what it seems. Caught in a flurry of unanswered questions, Sarah dives deep into the puzzling rabbit hole of Jack's past. But the farther in she climbs, the harder it is for her to get out. And soon she is faced with a deadly truth she may not be prepared for.

Do you really know the person sitting next to you? Is it ever okay to keep a secret? How far would you go to uncover the truths about the people in your life? My hope is that *MISSING PIECES* will spur on a lively discussion among your book club members.

Happy Reading,

Heather Gudenkauf



Character Discussion

| Main Characters | Supporting Characters |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Sarah | Margaret |
| Jack | Gilmore |
| Amy | Lydia Tierney |
| Dean | John Tierney |
| Hal | Julia Tierney |
| Celia | Gabe |

- Which character do you believe changed the most throughout the story? How did they evolve? Was it for the better or worse?
- What are your feelings about the character of Jack? Can you empathize with his desire to distance himself from his past? Should he share more with Sarah?
- The setting is almost a character in itself. Would this story work in a town or city larger than Penny Gate? How does Lydia and Jack's old house act as a character?
- The relationships depicted in this story are dynamic and complex. Which relationship did you find to be the strongest? The weakest? Which changed the most throughout the story?
- The supporting characters play important roles in plot development. Which of these characters would you like to know more about?

Plot Discussion

- A great mystery is able to shift suspicion throughout the story. Who did you suspect was behind Julia's death along the way?
- How does the title MISSING PIECES relate to the overall plot? Do you like the title? Would you pick an alternative title?
- Did you anticipate the ending? What clues did the author leave along the way?



Literary Style

- The author chose to make the main character an advice columnist. How did Sarah's alter ego of Dear Astrid aid the story and its development?
- The writing style of MISSING PIECES differs from Heather Gudenkauf's other books in that it is written in a third person, singular point of view. Her other books contain multiple points of view from various main characters. What does the reader gain from this single, all-knowing point of view? How would the story have changed if it were written in the style of Heather's other books?

Themes

- What role do secrets play in the story? Are we entitled to our secrets? If you share a life with someone, are you allowed secrets and to keep your past in the past?
- Discuss the theme of the past as it is used in MISSING PIECES. Do you believe a person's past defines and shapes their present and future? What about the character's in this story?
- Discuss the symbolism of including the "Three Blind Mice" nursery rhyme. Why do you think the author chose this nursery rhyme over others?
- The nature of the small town is a recurring theme throughout MISSING PIECES. Everyone in Penny Gate knows Jack, his family and his past. What is the significance of seeing the story unfold through Sarah's uniformed perspective?
- What other themes and symbols did you notice throughout the book?



Q&A with Author Heather Gudenkauf

Q: Where did the original idea for **MISSING PIECES** come from? How much has the story changed from your original concept?

A: I've long been intrigued by news accounts documenting the shock and surprise loved ones experience when they learn that a loved one wasn't quite the person they thought they were. I trusted him implicitly, says the woman whose husband has a secret family. She was always a reliable, hardworking employee, says the boss of the woman who embezzled thousands. How could you be so wrong about the person sleeping next to you, sitting next to you or living next door to you? People keep secrets—but how long are they able to keep them hidden and what are the ramifications? That's what I was trying to explore in **MISSING PIECES**. The novel did evolve quite a bit from my original vision of **MISSING PIECES**.

When I began the novel I envisioned the main character returning to her hometown after a failed marriage and finds herself caught up in a decades old mystery. Of course novels, as they often do, take off in a completely different direction and so did **MISSING PIECES**, but ultimately, this was the story I wanted to tell.

Q: Can you describe your writing process for this novel? Was it different than your past books?

A: As with all my novels, I began writing **MISSING PIECES** in longhand. I started with a kernel of an idea, bought a blank journal and then began sketching out details about each of the characters: what they looked like, their hopes and fears, their histories. Then I began writing. As a mom and educator, I write when I'm able. I do a lot of my writing in the evenings and on weekends and when I'm in the middle of a project every spare moment I have is spent writing. When the writing gets tough, I set pen and paper aside or close my laptop and get outside and go for a walk with my dog, Lolo. I find that spending time on area nature trails helps me clear my mind and gives me a new perspective on the project. After our hike, I'm able to come back to my writing with new eyes and a renewed sense of determination. Chocolate has been known to help too!

Q: Do you have a favorite character from **MISSING PIECES**? Any one that was particularly fun to write?

A: I really enjoyed writing through Sarah's lens. Here's a loving wife and mother who suddenly finds that her husband isn't the man she thought he was and her entire world shifts beneath her feet. It was so intriguing to be able to put myself into Sarah's shoes. My goal was to have the reader experience the twists and turns right along with Sarah.



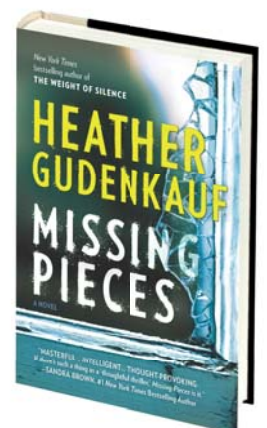
Q&A with Author Heather Gudenkauf

Q: What challenges did you face when writing this book?

A: MISSING PIECES is a little bit different type of novel for me. It's still a family drama, but typically I include several different points of view in my books. In this novel I wrote from only one character's point of view. At times I found it challenging to stay with that one focus. However, for MISSING PIECES, writing from Sarah's point of view was the right one. My hope is that the reader discovers right along with Sarah, all the secrets and twists and turns that Penny Gate has to offer.

Q: Did you learn anything about yourself as a writer while working on this book?

A: I had completed the first fifty pages or so when I realized that I was going the wrong direction with MISSING PIECES. I pretty much scrapped everything that I had written and started over. This was so discouraging at the time, but once I got on the right track things flowed much more easily and ultimately developed into a much better story. Despite how painful the process of cutting and editing can be, I always learn something new about myself and hopefully grow as a writer too.



Celia's Bloody Mary

INGREDIENTS:

1 large bottle (750 ml) vodka

12 cups tomato juice

½ cup lime juice

¼ cup Worcestershire sauce

2 tablespoons horseradish

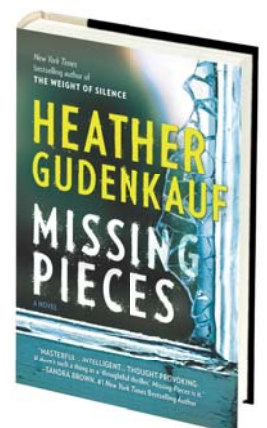
5 tablespoons celery salt

3 tablespoons fresh ground pepper

Celery, pickles, or olives to taste

Directions:

- Combine vodka and tomato juice in a large serving pitcher or beverage dispenser.
- Add in lime juice, Worcestershire sauce, and horseradish.
- Mix together celery salt and pepper, then add to pitcher and stir.
- Pour over ice and garnish to taste.



Margaret's "Best in Town" Lemon Squares

INGREDIENTS:

Crust:

1 cup butter, softened
2 cups all-purpose flour
½ cup granulated sugar
¼ teaspoon salt

Lemon Bar:

¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 ½ cups granulated sugar
4 eggs
⅔ cup lemon juice

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 350°F. Grease your square (9" x 9") or rectangular (8.5" x 11") pan.
- Blend together crust ingredients: butter, flour, sugar, and salt.
- Press the crust into the bottom of your pan.
- Bake for 20 minutes, or until firm and golden brown.
- Meanwhile, mix together lemon bar ingredients: flour and sugar first, then eggs and lemon juice.
- Pour into pan, over crust when baking is complete.
- Bake for an additional 20 minutes.
- Let cool, then cut and serve.



Sarah's In-Flight Playlist

- *Diary* by Alicia Keys
- *I'm Looking Through You* by The Beatles
- *Trust in Me* by Etta James
- *The Truth* by Dr. Dog
- *I'm Not Calling You A Liar* by Florence & the Machine
- *Does He Love Me* by Mary Wells
- *I've Been Loving You Too Long* by Otis Redding
- *Pretty Girls Make Graves* by The Smiths
- *You Don't Know Me at All* by Ben Folds & Regina Spector
- *Don't Lie* by Vampire Weekend
- *There's No Home For You Here* by The White Stripes
- *Dead and Gone* by The Black Keys
- *Hit the Road, Jack* by Ray Charles
- *You Know I'm No Good* by Amy Winehouse
- *I Know There's An Answer* by The Beach Boys
- *You Don't Fool Me* by Queen
- *Cold Shoulder* by Adele
- *One of Us Must Know (Sooner or Later)* by Bob Dylan
- *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* by Marvin Gaye
- *Suspicious Minds* by Elvis Presley
- *Time of the Season* by The Zombies
- *I Should Not Be Seeing You* by Connie Conway
- *He Hit Me (It Felt Like a Kiss)* by The Crystals
- *You Really Got Me* by The Kinks
- *9 Crimes* by Damien Rice

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