

IRREPLACEABLE  
Reading Group Guide

1. Why does Isabel decide to become an organ donor? Do you agree or disagree with her decision? Why does Alex voice such strong opposition to the idea? Do you find his reasons compelling?
2. The author of *Irreplaceable* tells the story from four points of view — not including those of several minor characters. Do you think this was effective? How so? How would the novel have been different if it had been told from only one point of view? Whose point of view would you have chosen? Why?
3. Alex is an archaeologist by training, and archaeology, as well as the more general subject of anthropology, appears throughout the novel. What connection does the novel make between archaeology and organ transplantation? What connection between archaeology and the nature of grief?
4. Why does Janet want to contact Alex after she receives Isabel's heart? Are her reasons and intentions genuine? If you received a donated heart – or any other major organ – would you try to contact the donor family? Why or why not?
5. Why does Alex react so negatively to Janet's attempts to approach him? Did you find his resistance justified? Why or why not? How would you react if you were in his place?
6. What kind of person is Janet? Do you like her? Do you respect her? What are her admirable attributes? What are her flaws? Is she a good person? Is she a good mother?
7. What kind of person is Alex? What are his admirable attributes? What are his flaws? What do you think of his behavior throughout the novel? Is he a better person at the beginning or at the end?
8. Alex's relationship with Bernice is complex. What draws them together? What divides them? Do you find their bond understandable or disturbing? Why?
9. Janet's husband David has difficulty, at various stages pre and post-transplant, dealing with her illness. Is David a bad husband? Do you sympathize with him?
10. What do you think of Jasper? What drives him to seek out Alex and Bernice and behave the way he does? How would you behave if you were so unfortunate as to find yourself in his position?

11. Part 2 of *Irreplaceable* goes into the past and, in alternating chapters, tells the story of Janet's illness and hospitalization, pre-transplant, alongside a contemporaneous account of Alex and Isabel's day to day life. Why do you think the author chose to structure this part of the novel in this way? Did you find it effective?

12. Do you think Alex's grieving process ultimately would have been easier if Isabel had *not* elected to donate her organs? If there were no part of her still alive in another person? Why or why not? What about for Bernice?

13. One could make the argument that we all have, at one time or another, for a few seconds or even longer, failed to pay adequate attention to the road while driving. The vast majority of us never kill anyone. Was Jasper just unlucky? If so, is he a victim, as he claims? How sorry for him should we feel? Which of the novel's other characters expresses the most empathy with him?

14. What do you think of the scene in Janet's apartment when she lets Alex listen to Isabel's heart beating in her chest? What kinds of thoughts go through his mind? How does this event affect his grieving? What does he mean when he thinks "Isabel's body is incontrovertibly gone. It must be, if this isn't it."

15. How do you feel about becoming an organ donor? Has reading IRREPLACEABLE made you more interested in doing so or less?

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