



BOOK CLUB KIT



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Discussion questions

- 1** Eugene's Angelman Syndrome causes him to be nonverbal, and this affects the way he is treated by members of his family. How does that parallel Hannah's experiences of when she first moved to the U.S. from Korea and didn't yet speak English? How does the treatment of others towards the nonverbal characters change their trajectories in the book?

What is Angie Kim conveying about the different ways we communicate?
- 2** The disappearance of the dad, Adam, is the central mystery of the book. After reading the ending, do you think this family will ever get closure?

At what point did the secrets being kept by members of this family start to hamper the investigation?
- 3** Mia, our protagonist, is an analytical thinker, yet she makes choices throughout the book that don't make logical sense: washing blood out of the clothing without telling anyone, for example. What is motivating her actions?

Why did the author choose Mia to be the narrator of this story?
- 4** Both foreshadowing phrases and flashbacks are used throughout the narrative. How did these effects impact the pacing of the narrative? Over how many days did it feel like the narrative took place? How many days did it actually take, in the book, to resolve the missing person story of Adam Parson?
- 5** What are some of the different types of communication used in the story (verbal, nonverbal, indirect, hearsay, etc.)? How is language used and misused by the characters? How does language move the story forward or keep the characters from reaching the truth?

Meet the Parksons

A biracial (Korean and white American) family living in northern Virginia. The kids' last name, Parkson, comes from the combination of Parson (Dad) and Park (Mom).

MIA PARKSON

Our narrator: A 20-year-old studying philosophy and music in college. Smart, funny, hyperlexic, with a tendency to overthink and overanalyze. Knows she can come across as aloof, arrogant, and annoying (and is working on that!) but loves her family and is fierce in wanting to protect her little brother.

JOHN PARKSON

A psychology major and summer intern at Henry's House, Eugene's therapy center. Mia's twin and happy-go-lucky, optimistic counterpart to Mia's pessimistic cynic. Generally a joy to be around. Presents as white, unlike Mia, who presents as Asian.

EUGENE PARKSON

A 14-year-old with a dual diagnosis: autism and a rare genetic disorder called mosaic Angelman syndrome, which means he can't talk, has motor difficulties, and frequently smiles and laughs, which most people interpret as being mindlessly happy. Believed to be the last person to see their father alive.

HANNAH PARK (MOM)

Stay-at-home-turned-working parent of the Parkson household. Immigrated from Korea as a college student, holds a PhD in applied linguistics, and currently works full-time as a Korean-English translator.

ADAM PARSON (DAD)

Former management consultant who became a stay-at-home dad and Eugene's primary caretaker four years ago. Obsessed with happiness theories and trying to quantify happiness. Currently missing; last seen with Eugene at River Falls Park.

What is Angelman syndrome?

- Angelman syndrome is a rare neurogenetic disorder that occurs in one in 15,000 live births or 500,000 people worldwide.
- People with Angelman syndrome have developmental problems that become noticeable by 6-12 months of age. In early childhood, other common symptoms appear, like walking and balance disorders, gastrointestinal issues, seizures, and little to no speech.
- Despite these symptoms, people with Angelman syndrome appear to have an overall happy demeanor, with a combination of frequent laughter and smiling and an easily excitable personality.
- Angelman syndrome shares symptoms and characteristics with other disorders including autism, cerebral palsy, and Prader-Willi syndrome. These similarities mean misdiagnosis occurs often.
- It is believed that there is a high chance of finding a cure for Angelman syndrome, due to the fact that scientists know what causes AS and have been able to reverse it in mouse models. Individuals with AS will require lifelong care, but can live long, happy lives.

Visit [Angelman.org](https://angelman.org) for more information.

Read alike

If you were interested in these themes and narrative devices from *Happiness Falls*, you may also like...

ASIAN-AMERICAN FAMILIES

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- Our Missing Hearts / Celeste Ng
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- Alias Grace / Margaret Atwood
- Never Let Me Go / Kazuo Ishiguro
- The Secret Keeper / Kate Morton

NONLINEAR NARRATIVES

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- The God of Small Things / Arundhati Roy
- Little Gods / Meng Jin
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- Han Woo Ri
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