

Mad Dash

Readers/Discussion Guide

Dash and Andrew have always been an odd couple; she's an impetuous, free spirited photographer; he's a history professor who drinks a glass of warm milk every night before bed. Still, they made it work for twenty years, raising a daughter and building a life together in spite of their differences. Then one night Dash had enough—enough of the faculty parties at Mason-Dixon College that Andrew insists they attend even though he won't mingle with his colleagues, of the constant fretting about illnesses he doesn't have, of the blue shirt/khaki pants uniform he'd been wearing since they met. Feeling angry and frustrated and sad, she walked out on him, leaving their comfortable Washington townhouse for a rustic cabin in the Virginia woods. Now, living on her own for the first time in years, Dash feels she can do whatever she wants . . . if only she could figure out what she wants to do. But every time she starts making plans for the future, she finds herself thinking about the past—remembering her mother, her daughter's childhood, and the husband she isn't entirely sure she wants to leave behind.

1. Everyone has heard the old axiom “Opposites attract.” Do they? And can they last? Dash and Andrew don't have much in common. What attracts them to each other initially? What keeps them together in the long term? How important are shared hobbies and interests to a relationship?
2. Dash's mother passes away just months before Chloe, her only child, leaves home for college. How big a factor do these events play in Dash's decision to leave Andrew? What does it mean to be a member of the “Sandwich Generation?”
3. Both Dash and Andrew claim to be annoyed by the other's foibles. What do you find annoying about Dash? About Andrew? What do you find endearing about each of them? Who would you rather be in a long term relationship with, gender notwithstanding? Why do the quirks we love at first turn into pet peeves over time?
4. The puppy Dash finds on her front porch becomes the catalyst for leaving Andrew. What does the puppy represent to Dash? What does it represent to Andrew?
5. Andrew tries to break things off with Dash after their first night together—why?
6. Like many people in the throes of a midlife crisis, Dash wants to “find herself.” What does this mean? Is it even possible? Does Dash manage to do it during her separation from Andrew?
7. Why is Andrew so reluctant to advance at work? How does his relationship with his father contribute to this? How does Andrew get over this problem?
8. Cottie and Shevlin Bender are happy after years of marriage—why? How are they different from the other couples in *Mad Dash*? What lessons can be learned from their successful marriage?
9. While living in Virginia Dash begins to spend time with the Benders' son in law, a local farmer named Owen. Why is Dash attracted to him? Do you think she has more in common with Owen

or Andrew?

10. Dash's friend Maureen is newly divorced after a long marriage. How is her experience of life after marriage different than Dash's? What do you think of her attitudes about love and marriage?
11. On page 178 Maureen says that only married people can appreciate the allure of loneliness. Why is the thought of being alone attractive to married people? Can you relate to that sentiment? Dash thinks women experience this more than men. What do you think? Is this experience the same regardless of gender?
12. Andrew says she was a good daughter but Dash harbors a lot of guilt about her mother. Why? Is it warranted? Discuss Dash's actions regarding her mother's thwarted suitor, Mr. Dreessen. What effect do motherhood and her own child's flight from the nest have on Dash's feelings about this? Why does this guilt make it harder for Dash to heal after her mother's death?
13. Her flight to the cabin makes the third time Dash has left Andrew. What happened the other two times? Why did she come back in the past? What's different now? What does this tendency say about her?
14. Dash believes she will get a lot out of having a whole week to herself at the cabin. Do you think she gets what she wants out of her week of solitude? Would you enjoy having a week all to yourself? What would you do with the time?
15. During their separation both Dash and Andrew come very close to committing adultery but don't go through with it. Why? What does Dash learn from Owen? What does Andrew learn from Elizabeth?
16. Dash and Andrew come close to making up many times before they actually do. What keeps them from getting back together? Why do they reunite when they finally do?
17. Since she's already decided to go home how important is Andrew's arrival at the cabin? How is Andrew's punch significant to Dash, especially in light of her advice to Owen regarding his estranged wife?
18. Once they've reconciled, Dash admits to herself that she never really planned to stay separated from Andrew. In light of this, do you think the separation was a good thing? For Dash? For Andrew? For them as a couple? What do you think its long term effects might be?