

All But Normal Reader's Guide

1. What part of *All But Normal* most resonated with you? What memories, if any, did it trigger from your childhood?
2. Which character in the book did you relate to most? Who would you say is the hero of the story? Why?
3. Have you ever been affected by the mental illness or the special needs of a family member or close friend? How did those experiences shape who you are today? In what ways did it impact how you currently relate to people with disabilities (e.g., those with physical, emotional, or mental challenges)?
4. What are some ways people in our culture respond to those with special needs? How did the different members of Beverly's extended family relate to her disabilities? Are you surprised by any of their responses? What more needs to be done for our society, particularly institutions like schools and churches, to embrace more fully those with special challenges?
5. In *All But Normal*, several "experts" and well-intentioned people tried to "fix" Beverly. What did Beverly want or need the most from those around her?
6. *All But Normal* is a "coming of age" memoir written by a son processing a childhood shaped by his mother's traumatic brain injury. If you were to write a "coming of age" story about your own childhood, what themes would be likely to emerge? What events or characteristics of your growing-up years shaped who you are today?
7. In a split second, when the truck hit their car, Beverly and John's lives were forever altered. Life happens, tragedies strike, and often we are left to pick up the pieces the best we can. How did your parents respond to difficult circumstances in your childhood? How do you find yourself responding when tough, unforeseen events happen to you?
8. Shawn shares many dramatic scenes from his childhood where his mother's illness caused chaos, stress, and confusion for him as a child. If you had to pick a scene from your own childhood that left an indelible mark on your memory, what would it be? Do you remember a visual detail like the corner of the ceiling that Shawn mentioned during the night his mother was taken away? What about this scene makes it stand out?
9. In spite of all the challenges of Beverly's life, she was a blessing to her family and

many others, especially those who were marginalized by society. What sustained her and enabled her to make a difference in people's lives?

10. Shawn calls his mother his "spiritual hero" and credits her for teaching him compassion for the marginalized and outcasts in society. When you look back on your life, is there a lesson you've learned or a character trait you've developed as a result of the brokenness in your past? How are you different, in a good way, because of the challenges in your childhood?