

# BOOK CLUB NOTES

## A WEEKEND WITH OSCAR

### ROBYN BAVATI



FOR READERS AGED 12+  
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**A MOVING #LOVEOZYA NOVEL ABOUT LOSS,  
FIRST LOVE AND BEING THERE  
FOR YOUR FAMILY, NO MATTER WHAT.**

Sixteen-year-old Jamie lives with his mum and his younger brother Oscar, who has Down syndrome. Though Jamie is still grieving the loss of his dad, life starts to look up when he meets Zara, the new girl at school. When their mum goes away for the weekend, Jamie volunteers to look after Oscar. But when the weekend is over and their mother doesn't return, Jamie faces the toughest challenge of his life.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robyn Bavati is the award-winning author of *Dancing in the Dark*, *Pirouette* and *Within These Walls*. She lives in Melbourne, where she was born and grew up. She lived in Israel for seventeen years. She is an active member of Toastmasters International, enjoys public speaking, and loves visiting schools.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Family is a core theme of *A Weekend with Oscar*. What does “family” mean to Jamie? How has his family helped shape his sense of identity?
- *“The cake sticks in my throat. I want to say, I miss him too. But I can’t bring myself to talk about Dad. We seem to have an unspoken agreement not to mention him,”* (page 7). How has the loss of his father affected Jamie, and how is he working through his grief? How are his ways of processing the loss similar or different to his mother or Oscar’s? Is there a right or wrong way to experience and express grief?
- Reread pages 60-62 where Zara explains to Jamie what art means to her. Do you agree or disagree with her definition? Describe something in your life that provides you the same purpose and meaning as art does for Zara.
- *“Sometimes I catch myself wanting to shout Just be normal! Why can’t you be like everyone else?” “But you don’t,” I say. “I may not do it, but I feel it. I’m a hypocrite, Jamie. I’m critical of others who can’t accept difference, but in my head, I can be just as guilty,”* (page 80). This novel is about something very few books cover – the experience of having a sibling with a disability. In what ways does *A Weekend with Oscar* explore how complicated this sibling relationship can be? How are Zara and Jamie’s experiences and relationships with their siblings similar or different?
- Do you think Jamie does the right thing by keeping his mother’s disappearance mostly to himself? Why or why not? How could the story have unfolded differently if he had told an adult?
- How is the theme of fear explored in the novel? What are some of the things the characters are afraid of, for themselves and for their families?
- Jamie explains to Zara why, unlike most of their peers, he’s no longer on social media. Can you relate to his experience of others’ inauthenticity online? Could you drop social media entirely, or like Zara suggests, would you be concerned about feeling disconnected?
- In her Author Note, Robyn Bavati says she *“would hate the reader to think that everyone with Down syndrome is ‘like’ Oscar. Similarly, Hayley is just one person with autism spectrum disorder, and should not be considered ‘typical’ of a person with ASD.”* How did reading *A Weekend with Oscar* give you insight into what it could be like to live with a disability, or to love and care for someone who does? How could that experience differ from individual to individual, family to family?
- Ethan Chandler uses an offensive slur to refer to Oscar (pages 12-13, 71 and 184), and Dan’s comedy routine mentions people asking where he’s from, even though they know they actually mean his ethnicity (page 6). How can our language, terminology and the words/phrases we use have incredible impact and harm on others?
- *“...it takes strength to ask for help, to admit that you’re struggling. He said it’s always the strongest people who ask for help,”* (page 172). When Dan passes on this advice from the school counsellor, Mr Patterson, initially Jamie disagrees. What pressures has Jamie put on himself? How are things different when he changes his viewpoint, and how has Jamie grown as a character by the end of the novel? You could also consider how this question applies to other characters, like Zara, Dan or Jamie’s mum.
- *“As I dress for school, I have an epiphany. I realise I’m terrified of becoming disabled. And disability reminds me of my own vulnerability. Maybe that’s why so many people are uncomfortable around people with disabilities – they’re terrified of becoming like them,”* (page 177). Do you agree with Jamie’s realisation? In what ways can we as a society change how we treat people with disabilities?