

Reading Group Guide: ONCE TWO SISTERS

1. What are your expectations for a book about sisters? How did this novel meet or subvert them?
2. An important aspect of the book is identity. How does Zoe try to leave her past behind? Can she simply start a new family or does her choice impact the way she interacts as a mother and a wife? What issues did she bring with her?
3. Zoe and Ava take turns telling this story. Do you think they are reliable narrators? Do they remember things differently? How do they describe each other and how perceptive are they about themselves?
4. When Andrew tells Zoe that she's like her parents because, "It's not easy for you to talk about your feelings," Zoe snaps back, "I'm nothing like them." Why do you think the "Doctors Hallett" act the way they do?
5. Ava tells stories not just through her writing, but also in her life. What stories does she tell Zoe? What stories does she tell herself? What purpose do these stories serve?
6. A key part of the mystery is the technique known as SERE: Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape. Do these words have any relevance to Ava and Zoe?
7. As Zoe confronts her brother-in-law Glenn, Ava is thrown together with her ex-husband Beckett. How do the sisters navigate these fraught relationships? Do their perceptions of their exes change over the course of the novel?
8. The nature of Zoe and Ava's relationship is at the core of the book. At first it seems they are complete opposites. As the story unfolds, can you see similarities between the two? What do you think made their relationship as bad as it became?
9. What's the difference between a story and a lie? Is Zoe justified in any of her lies? What effects do her lies have on her marriage? On her perception of herself?
10. The last scene of the book is in Zoe's words. Why do you think this is?
11. What do you think drove Cristina to her actions? Do you see any similarities or differences in the way Ava and Zoe responded to their upbringing?
12. Near the end of the book, Ava thinks, "Not every story has a happy ending." Do you think this one does?