

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Measure
by Nikki Erlick

BOOK GROUP

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nikki Erlick is a writer and editor whose work has appeared on the websites of *New York* magazine, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Newsweek*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Huffington Post*, *Indagare Travel*, *BookTrib*, and *Verge Media*. As a travel writer, she explored nearly a dozen countries on assignment—from rural villages in France to the arctic fjords of Norway. As a ghostwriter, she has lent her voice to CEOs, academics, and entrepreneurs. She graduated Harvard University summa cum laude and is a former editor of the *Harvard Crimson*. She earned a master's degree in global thought from Columbia University. *The Measure* is her first novel.

BOOK SUMMARY

Eight ordinary people. One extraordinary choice.

It seems like any other day. You wake up, pour a cup of coffee, and head out.

But today, when you open your front door, waiting for you is a small wooden box. This box holds your fate inside: the answer to the exact number of years you will live.

From suburban doorsteps to desert tents, every person on every continent receives the same box. In an instant, the world is thrust into a collective frenzy. Where did these boxes come from? What do they mean? Is there truth to what they promise?

As society comes together and pulls apart, everyone faces the same shocking choice: Do they wish to know how long they'll live? And, if so, what will they do with that knowledge?

The Measure charts the dawn of this new world through an unforgettable cast of characters whose decisions and fates interweave with one another: best friends whose dreams are forever entwined, pen pals finding refuge in the unknown, a couple who thought they didn't have to rush, a doctor who cannot save himself, and a politician whose box becomes the powder keg that ultimately changes everything.

Enchanting and deeply uplifting, *The Measure* is a sweeping, ambitious, and invigorating story about family, friendship, hope, and destiny that encourages us to live life to the fullest.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When the boxes arrive, many people believe they are a hoax. Would you have believed in the boxes' supernatural powers immediately? Why or why not?
2. Nina agrees to open her box, against her better judgment, because she doesn't want Maura to have to open her box alone. Later, national hotlines are set up so that people can speak to counselors while they open their boxes, rather than opening them alone. Why do you think it's so important to have a friend present when you open your box? Would you want to open your box with someone else or alone?
3. Erlick comes up with many unexpected ways the boxes could influence society: a rise in experimentation with heavy drugs, the creation of new dating apps, books of ancient mythology becoming bestsellers again. Can you think of other ripple effects the boxes might have on society? What subtle changes might your own box have on your life?

4. After the Memorial Hospital shooting, Nina describes the boxes as “the world’s most fucked-up version of the chicken-or-the-egg conundrum.” Do you think Jonathan Clarke’s box can be held responsible for his death? Would you rather see the boxes as a cause or an effect of human choice?
5. Hank’s decision to jump in front of the gun is described as “an instinctive impulse.” If he had more time to make a decision, do you think Hank would have given his life to save Anthony Rollins?
6. When the boxes arrive, the length of the strings can only be loosely interpreted. Gradually, technology advances so the strings can estimate the length of a person’s life plus or minus a few years. Then technology is released which predicts the month when a person will die.
Do you think the strings were intended to be used to make such precise measurements? If you received a string, would you rather know exactly what it means or have a vague idea of what it means?
7. After receiving short strings, many characters try to imagine the way they might die. If these characters received a second box telling them how they would die, do you think they would open it?
8. Ben feels deeply betrayed by Claire’s decision to open his box without his permission. Meanwhile, Jack and Javier struggle with the lies they have told their family about their strings. Do you think loved ones have a right to know the length of each other’s strings? If you had the opportunity to open a loved one’s box without them knowing, would you do it?
9. Rollins fuels the prejudice against short-stringers by stereotyping them as angry, mentally unstable, and dangerous. Do you think these stereotypes are used to fuel prejudice against minority groups in the real world? What other traits might be falsely used to fuel prejudice?
10. In one of Amie’s early letters to Ben, she writes, “Since the strings arrived, so many of our conversations are about such big, heavy ideas, literally life and death. And I miss talking about the little things.”
Do you think Amie’s desire to focus on “the little things” is a healthy way to cope with the boxes? How is Amie different from other characters, who cope with the boxes by seeing them as a reminder to make the biggest possible impact with their lives?

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