



HAPPY NEW YEARS

By Maya Arad

Translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Cohen

A Reading Group Guide



1. The collection of Leah's letters is framed by a fictional introduction by Dr. Gavriella Sadan, who writes, "The letters you are about to read have no literary merit," while adding "this collection is a document of enormous historical and ideological value, centering pivotal questions of gender, culture, and sexual politics." How did this introduction color your reading of Leah's letters? Do you agree with Dr. Sadan's assessment?
2. How does Leah's background as a Romanian immigrant to Israel and then an Israeli immigrant to the United States impact her sense of identity and belonging in America and Israel?
3. Leah originally does not plan to stay long in America, but ends up living there for the rest of her life. How do her feelings about her adopted country shift throughout her life? What factors keep her in America?
4. In her letters, is Leah a reliable narrator? Why or why not?
5. Leah is considered by many to be very attractive, as she mentions often in her early letters. How does her perspective on the role of beauty in her life change as she grows older?

6. How are Leah's relationships with other women impacted by her love life?
7. Though Leah is often on the outs with many of the women she corresponds with, and was not very close with them at the teacher's college, what is the importance to her of continuing to remain in touch with them?
8. Leah closes her first letter with the saying "Every time a door shuts, a window opens." How does this reflect Leah's attitude toward life? Do you think Leah is naive or optimistic?
9. Leah's romantic relationships often end badly, from Ammon, Yossi, to Jeff and even Les. Does Leah simply have bad luck?
10. "Women today stand on their own two feet instead of waiting for a knight in shining armor," writes Leah in her 1984 letter. From the beginning of the novel, Leah earns her own money, working as a Hebrew teacher and then in real estate. And after the end of her marriage, she raises her children single-handedly. What are Leah's views on the changing opportunities and freedoms available to her as a woman? What are the limits?
11. Over the five-decade span of the novel, great changes take place in technology, the status of women, and LGBTQ+ rights. How are these changes reflected in the book?
12. Does the afterword, penned posthumously by Leah's son, Yonatan, offer new insights into her character? In what ways?

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