

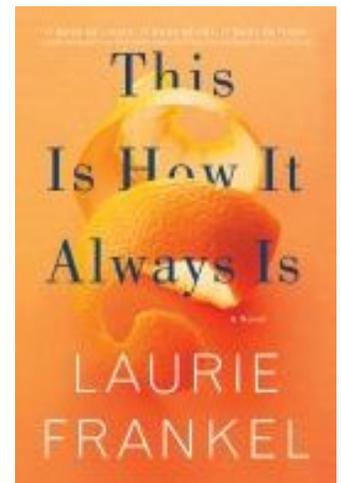


This Is How It Always Is: A Novel

Laurie Frankel

Discussion Questions

1. How do the epigraphs help prepare the reader for the many crossroads the Walsh-Adams family will have to face? What about the first word of the novel, “but”?
2. When Rosie and Penn first go to see Mr. Tongo about Claude, he asks them to divide behaviours into “boy” and “girl” columns. Do you think their conclusions are accurate? Are they fair? Discuss what you think it means to be a man, a woman, or “something else.”
3. In what ways does the book tackle typical definitions of boys and girls, men and women? Did it change your view of gender and identity as you read?
4. When Rosie first takes Poppy on playdates with other girls, the moms begin telling her how brave she is. “Rosie appreciated the support but wasn’t sure parenting ever really qualified as brave — or maybe it always did — because it’s not like you had a choice.” How are each of the characters brave? Discuss how (or if) parenting requires acts of bravery.
5. When Claude begins to voice his love of dresses, Rosie tells us, “Didn’t you know then, the doctors said later? Weren’t you listening?” Do you think our expectations of people, such as Rosie and Penn’s expectations of Claude, get in the way of us actually listening to them? Knowing them?
6. After Jane Doe’s trauma, Rosie thinks, “Head colds should be tolerated. Children should be celebrated.” What is the difference between tolerance and acceptance? Acceptance and celebration? Discuss how language, down to the pronouns we use, affects the way we interact with people different from ourselves.





This Is How It Always Is: A Novel

Laurie Frankel

7. After Poppy's secret is revealed, Rosie and Penn have an argument about how to move forward. Penn says, "As parents, we make a thousand decisions a year with life altering impact whose implications our kids couldn't possibly get their heads around. That's our job. That's what parenting is." Rosie counters with, "She's got to be lost for a bit, and she can't be lost if we're leading her out of the woods." Where do you fall in this argument?
8. Think about the standard fairy tale structure - in what ways is this novel a fairy tale? Is it the tale of Penn and Rosie, or Poppy? Their family? Or do you consider it another kind of story altogether?

About the Author

Laurie Frankel is the *New York Times* bestselling, award-winning author of three novels. Her writing has also appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *People Magazine*, *Lit Hub*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and other publications. She is the recipient of the Washington State Book Award. Her novels have been translated into more than twenty-five languages, and all three have been optioned for film or TV. A former college professor, she now writes full-time. She was recently named one of the 50 Most Influential Women in Seattle where she lives with her family and makes good soup.

Source: <http://www.lauriefrankel.net/about.html>