

The Names

by Florence Knapp

1. Do the seven-year leaps work for Bear, Julian, and Gordon (shown at age 7, 14, 21, etc)? Are these ages a good measure of the person each boy becomes?
2. Some reviewers mention that after their first reading, they chose to read the book again by name sections (all of the Bear chapters, then all of the Julian chapters). Did anyone try this and did that make the story clearer or change your thinking about the book?
3. Is the Epilogue necessary? Does it change your feelings for Gordon, Sr?
4. Do the chapter drawings influence how readers might feel about each boy?
5. Is the abuse too heavy-handed or does Knapp give us just enough to understand what Cora experiences? *(Thank you Gail Comorat for the above 5.)*
6. Using this “sliding door” structure, did Knapp succeed in keeping the three storylines separate/distinct? If so, how did she manage that?
7. Was the inclusion of the same characters in each storyline confusing at any time?
8. Did she tell us enough about each character? Too much?
9. How did Knapp manage to create the tone/feeling of each storyline?
- 10. What details about Bear, Julian, and Gordon create distinct characters? *(Thank you Lynne Judd for these 5.)***
11. Cora is the novel’s emotional center even though the narrative is partly organized around her son. How does Knapp keep Cora present and complex across thirty-five years without reducing her to the role of victim or survivor?
12. Gordon the father is a controlling abusive presence. How does Knapp render his character without making him a simple villain? What techniques does she use to suggest the systems—family tradition, professional reputation, social deference—that enable and sustain his behavior?
13. Maia, Cora’s daughter, has been described as central to the novel’s emotional core—particularly the bond between sibling and sister. How does Knapp differentiate Maia’s experience across the three timelines? In what ways is she the same person regardless of her brother’s name and in what ways is she fundamentally altered?
14. Domestic abuse is the novel’s subject. How does Knapp render its mechanics—control, silence, the gap between public reputation and private behavior—through specific scenes and details rather than through explanation or diagnosis?

15. The novel's central question is whether a name can change the course of a life. By the end of the novel has Knapp answered that question or complicated it? Is the argument that names determine fate or that they influence the conditions in which fate unfolds?
16. The Great Storm of 1987 is the novel's opening backdrop. How does Knapp use this historical event as more than setting? What does the storm contribute thematically and structurally to the novel's concerns?
17. The novel required Knapp to write essentially three versions of the same family across thirty-five years—maintaining consistency across timelines while differentiating them meaningfully. What organizational and structural challenges does this kind of project present and how does the finished novel suggest Knapp solved them?