

Reading Group Guide for *All the Ugly and Wonderful Things* by Bryn Greenwood

1. From the first moment we meet Wavy, her life is filled with rules. Most are her mother's rules, but some are hers. What rules are holding Wavy back and which ones does she use to construct a sense of safety? How do the rules change as she grows up?
2. Wavy's fears and her efforts to resist fear are major themes in the story. How does the refrain "nothing left to be afraid of" guide Wavy's life?
3. More than once, it's remarked that the kitchen door of the farmhouse is unlocked, and Wavy points out that there isn't even a key to that door. On a practical level, what does it say about Wavy and the people around her that this door is never locked? As a metaphor, what does it tell us?
4. Kellen is a murderer and Wavy knows this from an early point in her relationship with him. How is she able to know this while still considering him a good person? What things in her life have prepared her to accept two seemingly contradictory ideas? How do you feel about this paradox?
5. The book provides multiple points of view of Wavy and Kellen, including their own. How are your impressions of them altered by a narrator's biases? Who seems like the most reliable narrator? Who seems the least reliable? How do you decide whose opinion to trust?
6. Aunt Brenda's perspective is the one that most clearly correlates to our current social attitudes toward relationships like Wavy and Kellen's, but is she the hero of this story? To what degree do you sympathize with her?
7. Compared to Wavy, her cousins and her college roommate are ostensibly the product of "normal" upbringings. In what ways are they more emotionally healthy than Wavy? In what ways do they have similar emotional issues?
8. Until 2006, the state of Kansas had no law requiring a minimum age for marriage, as long as the underage bride or groom had parental or judicial consent. On occasion this produced child brides far younger than Wavy would have been. The law now sets the minimum age at 15, a year younger than the age of consent. How does marriage change our views of what would otherwise be statutory rape? What if Kellen's wish had come true, and he and Wavy had married after her 14<sup>th</sup> birthday? How would we view that relationship once it was sealed by law?

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9. When we talk about "consent" we have a bad habit of restricting it to the question of sex, but what other types of consent are at play in the story? Stress is placed on Wavy's capacity to consent to a sexual relationship with Kellen, but what about her capacity to consent or refuse consent to other things?
10. Of the female role models in Wavy's life, which has the greatest effect on her? How do these role models color her views about herself and her relationships?
11. As much as we may wish for Wavy and Kellen's relationship to remain platonic, what do you feel contributes to its steady shift toward becoming first romantic and then sexual? What might have happened if it had remained platonic?
12. Amy narrates a large portion of Wavy's life, while only revealing parts of her own. How does she choose what to reveal and what to hide? And why might she prefer to tell Wavy's story over her own?
13. What is the dynamic between Wavy and Kellen as husband and wife at the end? Who do you see as the decision maker? The moral compass? What other roles have they taken on, and how comfortable are they in those roles? Considering their backgrounds, how likely are they to succeed in creating a healthy relationship and a "normal" family?