

# This is How it Always Is



## About the Author:

Laurie Frankel writes novels, reads novels, teaches other people to write novels, raises a small person who reads and would like someday to write novels, in Seattle, Washington where she lives on a nearly vertical hill from which she can watch three different bridges while she's staring out her windows between words. She's originally from Maryland and makes good soup.

Frankel is the author of the novels *This Is How It Always Is*, *The Atlas of Love*, and *Goodbye for Now*.

## Inside the kit:

(8) copies of the book  
(1) book club guide

## About the Book:

(from Goodreads)

This is how a family keeps a secret...and how that secret ends up keeping them.

This is how a family lives happily ever after...until happily ever after becomes complicated.

This is how children change...and then change the world.

This is Claude. He's five years old, the youngest of five brothers, and loves peanut butter sandwiches. He also loves wearing a dress, and dreams of being a princess. When he grows up, Claude says, he wants to be a girl. Rosie and Penn want Claude to be whoever Claude wants to be. They're just not sure they're ready to share that with the world. Soon the entire family is keeping Claude's secret. Until one day it explodes.

*This Is How It Always Is* is a novel about revelations, transformations, fairy tales, and family. And it's about the ways this is how it always is: Change is always hard and miraculous and hard again, parenting is always a leap into the unknown with crossed fingers and full hearts, children grow but not always according to plan. And families with secrets don't get to keep them forever.

## Suggested Reads:

*The Boy in the Field* by Margot Livesy

*Mrs. Everything* by Jennifer Weiner

*The Scent Keeper* by Erica Baumeister



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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 behaviors 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. 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.
6. When Rosie feels guilt for forcing Roo to move, Carmelo tells her, “Parents choose one kid over another all the time.” Do you agree with this statement? How about Rosie’s earlier conclusion that “of course you could uproot a whole family of seven for the needs of just one of them because that’s what family means”?
7. “They never planned to keep Claude a secret. It was an accident. It was an accident plus opportunity plus special circumstances.” Do you think Penn and Rosie are hypocrites for keeping Poppy’s secret, and expecting the rest of the family to do the same? Are they truly to blame, or was the secret forced on all of them?
8. In the penultimate, fairy tale chapter, the witch tells Grumwald that he must share his story, that “story is the best magic there is.” What is the importance of sharing stories? Do secrets have their place as well, or do you agree that “secrets make everyone alone”?
9. 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?