

BRAND
NEW
HUMAN
BEING

"A fast-paced, first-rate
book by an immensely talented
new writer."—*Curtis Sittenfeld*

EMILY *a novel*
JEANNE MILLER



Reading Group Guide

Brand New Human Being

By Emily Jeanne Miller

Introduction

Logan Pyle is a lapsed grad student and stay-at-home dad who is barely holding his life together. His father, Gus, has died; his wife, Julie, has grown distant; his four-year-old son, Owen, has gone back to drinking from a bottle. When he finds Julie kissing another man on a pile of coats at a party, Logan decides he's had enough. He packs a bag, buckles his son into his car seat, and heads north with a 1930s Louisville Slugger in the back of his truck, a maxed-out credit card in his wallet, and revenge in his heart.

After some bad decisions and worse luck, he lands at his father's old A-frame cabin, where his father's young widow, Bennie, is now staying. She has every reason to turn Logan away, but when she invites him in, she opens the door to unexpected redemption—for both of them.

Discussion Points

1. The author begins this novel with the lines, "My name is Logan Pyle. My father is dead, my wife is indifferent, and my son is strange. I'm thirty-six years old. My life is nothing like I thought it would be." How did this opening prime you as a reader for what was to come? Why do you think the author decided to start with such a direct introduction?
2. The author, Emily Jeanne Miller, submitted this book under the name "E. J. Miller," and publishers assumed it was written by a man. As a reader, would you have approached the novel differently had you thought it was written by a man? Why or why not?
3. In the opening chapter, what are some of the techniques the author employs to establish Logan Pyle's mood and outlook on life? Give some examples that hit home with you.
4. Logan finds out that his wife and her boss—his father's old best friend—have been plotting to dig up his father's body for a case. How did he react when he finds this out through his wife's boss instead of his wife? How do you think you would have reacted in the same situation?
5. Prior to their road trip, who do you think Owen is closer to: his mom or his dad? Explain your opinion and give examples.

6. After Logan and Julie make love for the first time in the book, on page 100, Logan leaves the bedroom and returns to find his son in his place. How does this make Logan feel? Does it reinforce feelings Logan has been having about Owen? Discuss your answer.
7. Vincent Vargas's son, Doug, is the self-described "black sheep" of his family. When he reveals his opinion of Bennie, how does it affect Logan's opinion of his young stepmother?
8. On Thanksgiving Day, Owen and the other kids at the party are watching *The Empire Strikes Back* when Logan peeks in on them—specifically the scene toward the end of the movie when Darth Vader tries to convince Luke to join him. (Page 115) What significance or symbolism does this scene have for this book?
9. Why do you think the author decided to narrate this book from a male perspective? Did Logan's role as a stay-at-home "Mr. Mom" help with this point of view? How would the book have been different had it been written from a mother's perspective?
10. Do you believe Logan makes the right choice when he takes Owen on a spontaneous road trip? What are some of the factors that motivate him to do so?
11. What memory does Logan conjure up about the night of his father's funeral, on page 179? Do you view his character differently after learning about his encounter with his widowed stepmother?
12. When Logan and Julie talk by phone after he and Owen leave, with whom do you find yourself empathizing the most? Explain your opinion using examples from the novel.
13. After Owen's near-fatal accident on page 218, did Logan react the way you expected him to? Why do you think he seemed to go from devotion to abandonment?
14. On page 237, the narrator asks, "Why are doors so much harder to open than they are to close?" Do you agree with Logan, that doors seem to be easier to close than to open? Why or why not?
15. When giving his final decision to Stan about the unearthing of his father, Logan says, "Someone did die. I guess I just took a while to understand that it wasn't me." (Page 252) What prompts Logan to admit this to the old family friend?
16. What was your reaction to Logan's discovery in the last scene of the novel? Discuss the book's ending and how you think the story will continue beyond the ending of the novel.
17. In an interview, the author described this book as a story about a man going from being a son to being a father. Do you find that to be an accurate description of the novel's main theme? How would you describe *Brand New Human Being* to a friend who has not read it?