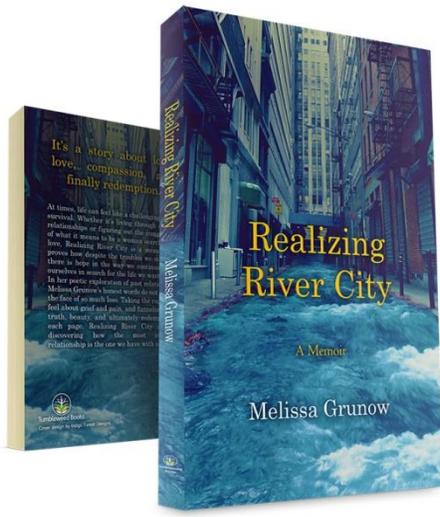


## Book Club/Reading Group Guide for *Realizing River City: A Memoir*



### Book Description:

At times, life can feel like a challenging feat of survival. Whether it's living through abusive relationships or figuring out the complexities of what it means to be a woman searching for love, *Realizing River City* is a memoir that proves how despite the troubles we may face, there is hope in the way we continually risk ourselves in search for the life we want to live. In her poetic exploration of past relationships, Melissa Grunow's honest words do not falter in the face of so much loss. Taking the rage we all feel about grief and pain, and funneling it into

truth, beauty, and ultimately redemption on each page, *Realizing River City* is about discovering how the most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves.

### A Reader's Review:

“Grunow's skillfully crafted memoir stuns readers with raw honesty in her search for a fulfilling and lifelong, romantic relationship. She expertly keeps the readers engaged as we follow her across the country and back again. She has us cheering for her and hoping for good things as the story moves along. We feel her defeat, confusion, passion and frustration page by page. This is the trademark of a great storyteller and this is what readers experience in Grunow's memoir. The unfolding journey portrays Grunow's growth as she draws strength from within herself and from those family and friends who are mutually supportive of one another.

Grunow's narrative ability stands out with her skill at weaving themes throughout the book with the opening on the rapids of the Rio Grande as an indication of the turmoil that will ensue throughout the book. It is truly a book that was hard to put down once I started it. She writes about her friends in such a way that I had my favorites and hated to see them move out of her life. And I loved Duke! You'll just have to read the book to find out about him. Melissa Grunow is a woman following her heart where it leads in her memoir *Realizing River City*.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. The book opens in present tense as Melissa chooses to spend the day tubing on the Rio Grande River, then flashes back to nearly a decade earlier when she ventures over the Rio Grande and into Mexico for a day, also alone. How does the book present other scenes of being alone? Is being alone equated to being lonely? How is personal safety defied in these scenes?

2. Even though the book takes place in the aftermath of a divorce, the marriage is not as heavily discussed as is the relationship with Raul. Why do you think that is? What is the difference in impact that the two relationships have on Melissa's character?
3. Although there is a lot of attention paid to failed relationships, there are also scenes of kindness, genuine love, and generosity. What do these scenes convey to the reader about the roles of different people in our lives? In what ways are Melissa's investment of her time, heart, and money all repaid literally and figuratively?
4. In Chapter 7, we meet Joe who becomes Melissa's roommate and they even co-adopt a dog together. There is obvious love between the two of them, however, she says, "Some months later someone asked me, 'Do you think on some level he loves you?' I didn't even have to pause. 'I think he loves me on many levels. But not the one where he is in love with me.'" Do you agree with her conclusion? How would you describe the relationship between them? How is the relationship further complicated by the introduction of Michelle?
5. How are river metaphors used to structure the narrative? Point to specific moments in the text where rivers or River City are presented, and how do they evolve over time?
6. What role does alcohol play in the book? Would you describe the consumption of alcohol as abuse? Addiction? Why or why not?
7. How is forgiveness negotiated in the text? Are there some transgressions that can never be forgiven? Is forgiveness necessary in order to move on with our lives?
8. What happens with Ryan? Why does Melissa pull away from him and ultimately abandon him without an explanation? She admits, "I was a coward who was going to disappear on him without any explanation or closure. Driving home, I left behind four DVDs on his table, shampoo in his shower, and a small chunk of my dignity in his bed" (p. 89). What does this mean for her? Is this a turning point or a relapse in her character development? Explain.
9. Melissa's sister, niece and a few female friends (e.g., Michelle, Leslie) make occasional appearances in the book. What do these female relationships mean?
10. Joe exits Melissa's life right around the same time Jason enters it. Who is Jason in comparison to Joe? How is the relationship with him different from the others earlier in the book?
11. The opening of Chapter 14 says, "My return to New Mexico after a seven-year hiatus was a slap of familiarity as I sat in the passenger seat and headed south on I-25 toward Truth or Consequences. Unlike every other place in my world, New Mexico had remained unchanged to me, the freeway the only sign of civilization for miles between exits." How does the sense of place function at this point in the story? What does it mean to return to anything that we once knew?

12. What does it mean to realize River City? When does Melissa experience her realization?

13. How does the book negotiate the difference between choosing to die and relinquishing oneself to death? Do we actually have this kind of choice in our lives? How much control do we have over our fate? How about destiny?

14. The ending of *Realizing River City* has been described as hopeful, but not necessarily happy. Would you agree or disagree? What is your assessment of the ending in terms of how it compares to portrayal of relationships and the narrator's portrayal of herself in the rest of the book?