

"Smart and wickedly funny, *When Franny Stands Up* is a timely and timeless story that will whisk the reader away on a joy-roaring ride through mid-century Chicago."

—WESLEY CHU, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the War Arts Saga

# WHEN FRANNY STANDS UP



*A Novel*

## EDEN ROBINS

# READING GROUP GUIDE

1. What are some of the different ways Franny Steinberg uses humor, and do they change over time? Do you think her humor helps her process her trauma or avoid dealing with it?
2. Did anything surprise you about the depiction of Judaism in the story? Is Judaism a religion, a culture, an ethnicity, or some combination thereof?
3. In our time, the language we use to talk about gender, race, sexuality, and more is in a state of refinement and flux. How does the story tackle such issues in a time where this refined language didn't exist? How do you think Hal would talk about themselves if they lived in the twenty-first century?
4. When Hal finally explores their gender, they become more confident and comfortable in their skin. By contrast, Franny's exploration of her identities is more tentative and troubled. For many people, coming out is a process of fully

becoming themselves, but in what ways might exploring sexual and gender identity be uncomfortable and slippery? Does that discomfort make the identity less true?

5. Is there anything you believe can't be joked about? How does the idea of "punching up" apply in this context? Conversely, is humor possible without pain?
6. Boopsie Baxter conjured the world's first Showstopper by accident during World War II after learning about the death of her mother. Do you think Showstoppers were invented in that moment? Or could they always have existed unnoticed or undiscovered?
7. Franny was ambivalent about conjuring a Showstopper, and when she did manage to, it was unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. If you conjured your own Showstopper, what do you think it would be? How might it surprise you?
8. When it comes to the Averys, Franny and the rest of the Steinbergs take pains to distinguish their words and behavior from the overt racism of the Finnegans. In what ways can racism be subtle, even to the point people might not recognize it in themselves? If it cannot be recognized, how can it be changed?

9. What is the significance of Lottie Marcone's refrain of "men aren't funny," echoed by Mama at the end of the book? Have you ever heard someone say "women aren't funny"? What did you think when you heard that?
10. What is the role of magic in the story? What does a Showstopper make possible—for comedians and audiences—that would be impossible without its particular magic?