

Book Club Discussion Guide

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The Art of Making Memories by Meik Wiking

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Dig into the science of memory as you learn how to be more present in everyday life.

QUOTE | “To paraphrase one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, Winnie-the-Pooh: you don’t know you are making memories, you just know you are having fun.”

QUESTION | What’s your favorite memory related to scrapbooking?

QUOTE | “When you turn forty your language changes; you are now entitled to use the word “nowadays.” You see colors differently: hair is not grey—it is “executive blond.” You find joy in new things, like leaving the oven door open after roasting vegetables to “get the benefit of the heat.””

QUESTION | If you have already turned 40, what do you remember that was different ‘after?’

QUOTE | “Our lives are not the days that have passed, but the days we will remember forever.”

QUESTION | What is one day you will never forget?

QUOTE | “Happiness research suggests that people are happier with their lives if they tend to hold a positive, nostalgic view of the past. Nostalgia is a universal and ancient human emotion and, today, academics across the world are studying how it can produce positive feelings, boost our self-esteem and increase our sense of being loved by another. This means that long-term happiness can depend on your ability to form a positive narrative of your life.”

QUESTION | Is there a time in your life for which you feel the most nostalgia?

QUOTE | “I wanted to retrieve and restore them because our memories are the cornerstones of our identity. They are the glue that allows us to understand and experience being the same person over time.”

QUESTION | How often do you create layouts that are just about you and observations about yourself?

QUOTE | “When we took a closer look at the happy memories, patterns started to emerge in the stories. People were remembering experiences that were novel, meaningful, emotional and engaged the senses.”

QUESTION | If you think about a number of happy memories, do any themes emerge about when you are most happy?

QUOTE | “We also asked people why they thought they were remembering a particular memory and 7 percent mentioned that they had now been turned into stories or outsourced in mementos, diaries and photographs.”

QUESTION | Do you have any memories you know are only from a photo?

QUOTE | “Write, photograph, record, collect. Be Marie Kondo’s archenemy.”

QUESTION | Are you Marie Kondo’s BFF or archenemy?

QUOTE | “When you retrieve memories from your episodic memory it involves you traveling back in time and re-experiencing them.

QUOTE | “In addition, episodic memory can be seen as a sixth sense—a sense for the past.”

QUESTION | Do you find it easy or difficult to recall memories from the past?

QUOTE | “Ask any older person to recall some of their memories and there’s a good chance they will tell you stories from a period in their life when they were between the ages of fifteen and thirty.”

QUESTION | Think of a great memory from your past. What age were you?

QUOTE | “Extraordinary and novel experiences are subject to greater elaborative cognitive processing, which leads to better encoding of these memories. That is the power of firsts. Extraordinary days are memorable days.”

QUOTE | “If we want life to slow down, to make moments memorable and our lives unforgettable, we may want to remember to harness the power of firsts.”

QUESTION | What is a first that you remember?

QUOTE | “Sometimes, it isn’t what the taste is like but what that taste reminds us of that is the attraction.”

QUESTION | Is there a taste that always triggers a memory for you?

QUOTE | “As they say, behind every favorite song there is an untold story.”

QUESTION | What story would your favorite song tell?

QUOTE | “Stephens–Davidowitz found that the songs most popular among men are those that were first released when they were between fifteen and sixteen years old; for women, the magic music age is between eleven and fifteen.”

QUESTION | What song always ‘takes you back’ and how old were you when it was released?

QUOTE | “And now some of the stories and memories of my father are integrated into the shared memory of a lovely summer afternoon walking around Aarhus.”

QUESTION | Can you think of a time when you created a new memory like this?

QUOTE | “Brain scans show that thinking about the past and the future activate roughly the same areas of the brain. Our memories shape our hopes and our dreams for the future.”

QUESTION | What is one memory that you would like to shape or guide your future?

QUOTE | “In other words, the idea is that the act of walking through the doorway makes the brain believe that a new scene has begun and that there is no need for memories from the old scene.”

QUESTION | Do you often forget why you walked into another room?

QUOTE | “As we shall see later, today we have great opportunities to outsource our memory to photographs. But, however convenient snapping pictures throughout our holidays might be, it may also mean that you are not paying attention. If you see something without attention, there is less of a chance that you will remember it.”

QUESTION | Have you found yourself wanting to pay more attention to what you are documenting?

QUOTE | “What people remember are the big days in their life: the milestones we pass, the moments where we experience a sense of meaning, a sense of connection with our loved ones, with the world and with life itself.”

QUOTE | “The tiny moments which may go unnoticed or seem insignificant to others can be those moments that never leave us, those moments when the small things in life turn out to be the big things in life.”

QUESTION | Are big moments or tiny moments more vivid in your memory? Which do you scrapbook about more often?

QUOTE | “So happy memories can be bittersweet, but they also assure us that we are valued as people, that we have deep connections with other people and that we have led a meaningful life.”

QUESTION | What is the first bittersweet memory that comes to mind? Have you scrapbooked it?

QUOTE | “We all have these palms–to–face experiences, ones we still haven’t got over even years later. They pop up in our memory when we least expect them and when we least want them to.”

QUESTION | Can you think of an embarrassing memory that keeps resurfacing?

QUOTE | “A flashbulb memory is a snapshot of a moment in time when an important event took place; the term was coined by Harvard psychologists Roger Brown and James Kulik in 1977. They believed that when important events happen they are stored in a vivid and detailed way so we can access the memory later on, analyze the experience and perhaps avoid similar events in the future, if the experience was dangerous.”

QUESTION | What’s on your list of ‘flashbulb memories?’

QUOTE | “The question is, if, at the end of your next holiday, you knew you would be given a drug that would cause amnesia and you would not be able to remember anything, how would you plan your holiday? If you would experience it, but have no memory of that experience, what would you do?”

QUESTION | So... what would you do?

QUOTE | “According to Kahneman, the peak–end rule is that our memory of past experience (whether pleasant or unpleasant) does not correspond to an average level of positive or negative feelings but to the most extreme point and the end of the episode.”

QUESTION | Can you think of a time where the most extreme or end of a memory clouded the whole story?

QUOTE | “If we don’t do anything stupid, if things don’t go wrong, we don’t have any stories to tell.”

QUESTION | Is there a ‘mishap story’ your family always tells?

QUOTE | “When I look around, I realize I have not furnished the room with paintings and objects, I have furnished it with stories.”

QUESTION | What is one story you notice looking around the room right now?

QUOTE | “My work and my hobby are both attempts to capture this elusive thing we call happiness. To ask time to freeze. To allow us to savour those moments when all felt right in the world. It has been an attempt to preserve happiness for that 1/250th of a second.”

QUESTION | Agree or disagree? Scrapbooking is the most powerful way to freeze time.

QUOTE | “It means taking pictures of your everyday life. Of everyday objects that might not seem memorable now but will be immensely fun to look at twenty, thirty or forty years from now. The background in some of the pictures from my childhood in the eighties and nineties yields curiosities like rotary–dial phones, enormous computers and deep–pan TVs.”

QUESTION | Have you ever noticed something worthy of a story in the background of a photo?

QUOTE | “Through our devices and social media accounts, we store mountains of details from our lives, but we never seem to organize them. As I see it, the problem is not the lack of collecting but the lack of curating and preserving. Our digital libraries are a total mess. We store photos—but we seldom see them. We get crushed under our own big data.”

QUESTION | Do you feel crushed by your own mess?

QUOTE | “You can always make money—you can’t always make memories.”

QUESTION | What does this make you think about? Does it make you want to adjust your behavior?

QUOTE | “The days between Christmas and New Year’s Eve are a good time to go over the digital photos you, and possibly your family, took this year. Share what you all thought were the happiest moments and select which hundred photos should be printed out.”

QUESTION | Would you ever do a Happy 100 project?

QUOTE | “The act of being proactive in preserving your digital photos to make them last for decades and for the next generation might well be one more happy memory.”

QUESTION | When do you get the most joy from scrapbooking?

Want to chat about the book?
Join us in the My Simple Scrapper community
on May 28, 2020 at 8:00 p.m. for our discussion.

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