

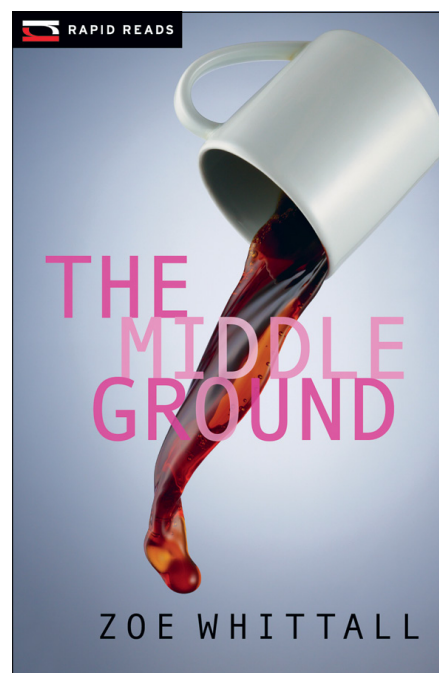
READING
GUIDETHE MIDDLE GROUND
ZOE WHITTALL

Reading level: 4.2

Interest level: Adult

Themes: relationships, trust, literacy

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**Summary**

Missy Turner's son has gone to summer camp for six weeks, leaving behind an empty house—and a mother who realizes her only child will soon leave home. Missy heads for work, only to learn that the hardware store is closing and she's out of a job. Naturally upset, she returns home—and walks in on her husband Dale making out with their next-door neighbor. Shocked, Missy heads to the café in town. Her day turns from bad to worse when, moments later, she finds herself being held at gunpoint—even if it is by a sexy Jude Law lookalike who smells like wood chips and soap.

But the robbery goes wrong, and the police show up. Right there, Missy makes a choice. Her son is growing up. Her husband is a beer-bellied cheater in sweatpants. Maybe her sister is right: maybe she *does* need some adventure in her life.

Missy helps the thug escape and eventually agrees to join him on a road trip to New York. Enthralled by her sudden freedom—and uncharacteristic *badness*—Missy camps out with her renegade outlaw in a tawdry motel. She buys his stories about how he's really not a criminal, just a guy who's been dealt a bad hand. But hours later, the guy pulls a gun on yet another cashier—and Missy finally connects the dots.

Missy and her husband spend the summer apart. But her dangerous fling with the gunman has helped her see what matters most—and where she needs to make changes. As the summer draws to an end, Missy and Dale are back together, preparing to welcome their son home. There is a good chance they will work things out.



Questions for Discussion

1. When the bandit has his gun trained on Missy and Christina in the café, Missy tells him if justice doesn't find him now, it will catch up with him later. What is your impression of her statement? Brave? Foolhardy? Risk-seeking? Explain.
2. What is the irony in the message on the robber's keychain: *Death Before Dishonor*? Where do you know this saying from?
3. When she's pressed up against the ice machine behind the café, Missy elects to give her car to the criminal so he can get away. Do you agree or disagree with her decision? What are Missy's other choices?
4. As you see it, for what reasons does Missy give the wrong information to the police officer after the robbery?
5. Missy lives in the same small town where she grew up. As you see it, what are some of the challenges inherent in her situation?
6. Why does Missy choose compassion for Red (Roger)? What's in it for her to keep his identity a secret?
7. After Missy drops off Red's car and swaps it for her own, she sits on a parking block and cries. She ignores her phone in a way "the old Missy" never would have. She says she feels "done" with everything. Why? Explain what has driven Missy to this point.
8. Why doesn't the author tell the reader right away that Missy caught her husband cheating on her? Why does she wait until the reader is deep into the story?
9. When Missy arrives at the diner to meet Red, she sets her phone to ring in 15 minutes. What's her motivation for doing this?
10. What's your opinion of Red saying (in terms of sexual relations) that men are essentially lazy and that they'll get away with anything they can?
11. As you see it, did Missy really want to make a new life with Red? How far down that path would she have gone if he hadn't held up the food court cashier? What would make her turn back?
12. Why does Missy's therapist say Roger is "not knowable"?
13. At the end of the book, Missy says she sometimes thinks about Roger in prison, and she feels badly. "After everything he did, I still feel some compassion." For what reasons does Missy feel this way?
14. In your opinion, how hard is it to walk away from a life of comfort and predictability? Why are humans inevitably drawn back to that comfort? Under what conditions will people actually break free and start anew?

