

BECOMING NICOLE GUIDED READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To guide you as you are reading *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family* by Amy Ellis Nutt, the Advising and Summer Reading Committee compiled a list of questions*. Please answer and reflect on these questions as you read. You are encouraged to bring your responses and reflections to the small group discussions you will have with your Gateway classmates and University community members (faculty, staff, alumni, and student leaders) during Turning Titan: New Student Orientation 2018.

1. The subtitle of *Becoming Nicole* is *The Transformation of an American Family*. In what ways do you think the members of the Maines family transformed themselves over the course of the book? How has the definition of the “average” American (or your home country) family transformed over time?
 2. Amy Ellis Nutt asserts that “the definition, the descriptive behaviors, the look and feel and experience of gender have all changed over time.” Do you agree or disagree? If you agree, how would you say these things have shifted over your lifetime?
 3. Before Wyatt was born, “Wayne imagined all the things he’d be doing with his first male child—playing catch, shooting baskets, firing deer rifles” (p. 12). Later, Wayne refers to Wyatt’s friend Leah as his girlfriend (p. 30). What assumptions do adults make about gender and sexual identity in babies and children? What influence do you think this has on the children as they grow up? In general, how do gender stereotypes play into a parent-child relationship?
 4. When Kelly first hears the term *transgender*, she avoids using it because she doesn’t want to label or pigeonhole Wyatt. But on Wyatt’s seventh birthday, Kelly finally embraces the term and allows herself to buy him the toys he really wants (48-49). Do labels limit people or liberate them? Do we need gender labels?
 5. Nicole and Jonas went into “stealth mode” for two years of middle school. Do you think this was ultimately the right decision for the family? Can you think of other examples of “stealth mode” or “passing” in history?
 6. As part of his campaign to defeat Maine’s bathroom bill, LD 1046, Wayne wrote, “We have tried to live our lives privately, but the stakes are now too high to sit on the sidelines” (p. 206). In what ways do you think an individual can make a difference politically?
 7. After reading this book (specifically chapter 20), think about who is responsible for protecting vulnerable students at school. What roles do school administrators, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and other students play? What influence can bystanders have on a bully?
 8. Nicole writes in a letter to the universe: “... isn’t this the same argument that we have been having for years now? First it was African Americans, then it was Jewish people, now it’s the LGBTQ community. Really I think people just want something to complain about, so they target minorities” (pp. 154-155). Are there parallels between the Civil Rights movement, the Women’s Rights movement, movements for religious tolerance, the Gay Rights movement, and the current push for greater rights for transgender people? How do these movements differ and how are they similar?
 9. The author shows that our knowledge of gender and sexuality has come a long way in the past fifty years. What surprised you most to learn? What questions do you still have?
 10. *Becoming Nicole* is a series of triumphs, heartbreaks, and accomplishments. Which part(s) of the story did you find the most interesting, moving, or important?
-

*These questions have been copied and modified from the following:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/231789/becoming-nicole-by-amy-ellis-nutt/9780812995435/readers-guide/>

http://images.randomhouse.com/teachers_guides/9780812995435.pdf