How to Dance It Out, Stand in the Sun
and Be Your Own Person

SHONDA RHIMES

READING GROUP GUIDE
INTRODUCTION

With three hit shows on television and three children at home, the uber-talented Shonda Rhimes had lots of good reasons to say NO when an unexpected invitation arrived. Hollywood party? No. Speaking engagement? No. Media appearances? No.

And there was the side benefit of saying No for an introvert like Shonda: nothing new to fear.

Then Shonda’s sister dropped a grenade on Shonda’s seemingly safe, happy life: “You never say yes to anything.” These words stuck in Shonda’s brain and prompted her to challenge herself: for one year, say yes to everything. Say YES to the unexpected invitations that come your way. Say YES to the things that scare you. Shonda reluctantly set out—and the results of her hard-won, yearlong journey are nothing short of transformative. In Year of Yes, Shonda Rhimes chronicles the powerful impact saying yes had on every aspect of her life—and how we can all change our lives with the power of YES.
1. Shonda Rhimes has spent her entire life “making stuff up” and was lucky enough to make a career doing something she loves that comes naturally to her: writing fiction. Why, then, do you think it is such a challenge for Shonda to write this book and to tell the truth about herself?

2. Why does Shonda decide to spend a year saying yes to things that scare her? Do you think she makes the right choice? If you were in her place, would you have committed to a Year of Yes? Why or why not?

3. Compare Shonda’s previous experiences with publicity and media appearances, such as the TCA panels or the Oprah interview when she was “a walking panic attack” (40) to her publicity experiences as the Year of Yes progresses. How does the Dartmouth commencement speech act as a turning point?

4. How does Shonda’s sense of humor affect her experiences throughout the Year of Yes? Does it help her along the way, or does she use it as a shield?

5. Early on in the Year of Yes, publicist Chris calls Shonda out to prove that it’s not just big talk and to hold her accountable to saying yes to publicity opportunities. Why is having a strong support network so important? How does it affect Shonda’s success and motivation?

6. What does Shonda learn from her own characters, such as Christina Yang on Grey’s Anatomy?
7. How does motherhood change Shonda’s priorities? How does it change her relationships with and perspective on working mothers?

8. Saying yes began to take Shonda away from home too often, away from her children, and from sleep. How does saying yes to saying no allow the pendulum to swing back to moderation? How does Shonda’s family help ground her?

9. Shonda writes about the importance of uninterrupted time for *yes*, for love, for what makes us happy; with no cell phones, laundry, or growing to-do lists to get in the way. What can you do in your own life to be more present, to give your uninterrupted attention to your loved ones?

10. How was Shonda’s relationship with food and her own body changed by saying yes?

11. Shonda is often recognized as a trailblazer for the way she portrays diversity in her shows (which she calls just plain normal), and the stakes are often very high for Shonda as F.O.D. (First. Only. Different.) How does the pressure affect her and her pursuit of *yes*? Do you think she embraces her role as “trailblazer”? Why or why not?

12. Consider this passage as Shonda reflects on the difficulty many women have with accepting a compliment: “When you negate someone’s compliment, you are telling them they are wrong. You’re telling them they wasted their time. You are questioning their taste and judgment” (193). How does saying yes change the way Shonda thinks about giving and receiving compliments? How does this affect her overall confidence?
13. While it was difficult (okay, maybe excruciating), what does Shonda learn from her realization that she doesn’t want to get married? What would you have done in her situation? Why?

14. Shonda writes that when she does something, she *really* does it and throws herself into it 100 percent. What would you do if you weren’t restricted by fear?

**ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB**

1. Watch Shonda’s Dartmouth speech at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuHQ6TH60_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuHQ6TH60_I). Watch for the moment when she exhales out her fear, then exhale out your own fear and share your best graduate-ready wisdom with your book club.

2. Dance it out. Prepare a playlist of your favorite songs that you can’t help but dance to, and have a dance party at the end of your book club meeting. Share your favorite songs, your favorite dance moves, and dance it out together!

3. Watch your favorite Shondaland shows with your book club. Go back to the beginning with *Grey’s Anatomy*, *Private Practice*, *Scandal*, or *How to Get Away with Murder*. 