



Big Summer

BOOK CLUB KIT






This reading group guide for *Big Summer* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

The #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Jennifer Weiner returns with an unforgettable novel about friendship and forgiveness set during a disastrous wedding on picturesque Cape Cod that *People* magazine calls “clever and empowering.”

Topics & Questions for Discussion

{ SPOILER ALERT }

1. How did the novel's prologue frame your reading experience? How did you imagine that these characters would later fit into the narrative? Were you surprised to discover Nick's secret? What did you learn about his mother from this scene that informed your reading of the rest of the book?
2. Daphne and Drue have always had a complicated, manipulative relationship that has left Daphne feeling hurt and betrayed. In the end, what do you think was a bigger factor in Daphne attending Drue's wedding? Was it her general curiosity, the photo opportunities, or her willingness to forgive? Do you think you would have made the same decision in her position?
3. One rule of appearance that Daphne outlines at the beginning of *Big Summer* is to give the impression that “I care, but not too much” (p. 11). How is this related in particular to being a woman, especially a somehow marginalized one, on social media and even out in the world?
4. Aditya says of Drue, “I used to think, sometimes, that there were two Drues. Two people inside of one. There was the girl who was happy with me, volunteering and going to Red Sox games and sitting in the bleachers, or staying in and cooking... Then there was the other Drue. The woman she was raised to be” (p. 325). Is it possible that both of these personalities were real? Or do you think that one was more authentic than the other? And why was Aditya the character who experiences both versions?

- 
5. Many characters in this novel are living with big secrets. For example: Nick has changed his name to escape his mother's legacy, Leela Thakoon has also taken on a new identity, and Drue faked her entire wedding for the media attention. Is there a pattern to their motivations, or some secrets you find more justifiable than others?
 6. One major theme in *Big Summer* is nature vs. nurture. Does being born into a pedigreed family automatically guarantee a certain personality, or are we more affected by the behavior of those around us? How do Mr. Cavanaugh's different extramarital children exemplify this? And how does this affect people's ability to change?
 7. *Big Summer* explores various characters' relationships to food. Daphne's father teaches her to eat adventurously, Daphne's grandmother views food as a tool to control her weight, and Drue, in a departure from her usual upscale choices, makes sure her wedding guests have chicken fingers and fries to come home to after a night of partying. What makes food so intimate, and what does it mean to Daphne to "ask your body what it wants" (p. 36)?
 8. Social media has changed Daphne's life. It's not only her main source of income but where she's found a community of women who make her feel seen. At the same time, she acknowledges, "'Even if things don't get better, you can always make them look good on the Internet'" (p. 60), which we see in action as Drue curates a pristine, if inaccurate, online presence. How has social media affected how all of us live our lives? Is there a way to be truly authentic online? (You might remember that Nick asks, "'How are [kids] going to learn to have real relationships when most of their interactions are online?'" [p. 297])
 9. One big theme of the book is forgiveness. Even Darshi, who was most skeptical of Daphne's willingness to defend Drue, ultimately says, "'No matter how bad Drue was, everyone deserves justice'" (p. 349). Do you agree? Are there other characters in the novel whose ultimate transformation supports your argument?
 10. Daphne is a proud fat woman. Even so, like all people, she experiences moments of doubt that manifest in the taunting echoes of fat jokes she hears in her head (what she calls "my traitorous mind" [p. 135]). What does this say about how we internalize societal messages, even if we love ourselves? And how does this inform Daphne's answer to the recurring question "How can I be brave?"
 11. Midway through the novel, Daphne calls Drue "the luckiest girl I knew" (p. 155). However, in the scenes that follow it dawns on Daphne that Drue might have thought the same of her as a child. In the end, what does it mean to Daphne to be "lucky"?
 12. Jennifer Weiner chose two iconic settings for *Big Summer*: Cape Cod and New York City. Both places are known for their glitz—Cape Cod as the beachy getaway for many a Kennedy, and New York City as a cultural hub. What was the effect of choosing these locations, either on each character's upbringings or the assumptions they make about one another, especially as relates to socioeconomic class?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. *Big Summer* is filled with descriptions of food and references to New York City restaurants. Daphne even posts on social media about her Sunday meals with her dad. If you could eat at any restaurant in the world which would you choose, who would you go with, and what would you order? Share your response with your book club!
2. Anyone who's ever graduated from high school can relate to the experience of "getting to know someone as an adult." Is there a friend you wished you'd stayed in touch with? If you feel comfortable doing so, reach out to them.
3. Try to go a week—or, if it's more realistic, a day—without social media, either viewing or posting. What do you miss the most? Do you notice any change in how you perceive yourself and others?
4. Now do the opposite—go to social and share an Insta vs Reality shot of where you wish you were reading vs where you actually are. Make sure you tag [@JenniferWeinerWrites](#) and [@AtriaBooks](#)!
5. Visit Jennifer Weiner's website at JenniferWeiner.com to learn more about her and her books, and follow her on Twitter [@JenniferWeiner](#) and on Instagram [@JenniferWeinerWrites](#). Tag your book club posts using #BigSummerBookClub

A Conversation with Jennifer Weiner

Big Summer incorporates many important themes, including body image, social media presence, and friendship. Also, that weekend wedding took a crazy turn we didn't see coming at all! What first inspired you to start writing this book? Was there a specific scene or theme that served as the spark?

Jennifer Weiner: After I finished my 2019 novel, *Mrs. Everything*, which covered seventy years of American history, and took place in eras and in cities in which I'd never lived, I was ready for a break. My intention was to write something light and breezy that took place over a compressed period of time, with high stakes and heightened emotions. A wedding seemed like the obvious fit, and I chose the setting because I've spent a lot of time on the outer Cape and I know it well. Once I had my setting, my main character arrived. I knew I wanted to write about a young woman who was struggling with her self-esteem and finding her purpose and her place in the world...which, of course meant writing about social media and the Internet.

One of the themes we especially love is the impact of online culture on our real lives. Daphne is an Instagram influencer and her ex-best friend, Drue, is marrying a reality TV star. In *Big Summer*, you tackle our digital age so realistically without portraying it as necessarily good or bad. Did your own personal take on online culture evolve as you were writing the book?

JW: I was a late adapter to Instagram, and I really didn't know much about influencer culture before I started researching *Big Summer*. That research took me on a deep dive into some of Instagram's tawdrier corners—I will never, ever get over the story of the hot young couple who presented their engagement scavenger hunt as this delightful spontaneous thing they were letting their fans get a glimpse of, and then the whole thing turned out to be not only scripted but sponsored. It would have been easy, and it was very tempting, to dismiss it as having nothing to do with me, but I realized that anyone who's on social media is engaging in a kind of performance. Maybe we're not as dishonest as the scammers, but we all make choices about what to show and what not to show, which filters and angles to use, how to frame and present what we're sharing. Everyone who uses social media, including me, is leading a double life—the one that we actually live, and the one that we show. That's something I find myself thinking about a lot, as I post and engage with readers.

Anyone who's on social media is engaging in a kind of performance.



AUTHOR PHOTO © ANDREA CIPRANI MECCHI

Now we have to ask more about that beautiful setting, since we are all about armchair travel these days. *Big Summer* takes place over a weekend at a fancy wedding in Cape Cod. Besides the fact that it's gorgeous, what about Cape Cod made you decide to set it there? Also, what vacation are you excited to go on after quarantine?

JW: I grew up in Connecticut, and every summer we would spend a week or two on the Cape. Those towns, those beautiful, unspoiled, uncrowded beaches, that bracingly icy water, the sunsets, the drive-in movie theater in Wellfleet, the homemade ice cream at Sweet Escape and fried clams and onion rings at Arnold's, all of that spells summer to me. I was so happy to be able to set the bulk of the book there, and share my love with readers. And I am longing to go back and be at the beach again, so that's where I'll go, once it's safe.

Here at Get Lit, we're obsessed with pop culture, so we can't help but wonder: What have you been watching, reading, and/or listening to lately? Basically, please tell us everything you're loving these days.

JW: My husband and I are watching "Friday Night Lights" for the first time, and it is really kind of a perfect show—it's funny and touching and dramatic and real. I loved "Unorthodox" on Netflix, which was about a young Orthodox Jewish woman who runs away from her abusive marriage and tries to start a new life in Berlin, and "Dark," a German series about time travel and a town with a lot of secrets, and fate versus free will. I also loved "Tales from the Loop" on Amazon Prime, which was based on a book of art photography. It's a series of linked episodes that all take place in a small midwestern town whose residents have a different relationship to time and technology than the rest of us. The juxtaposition of rusting robots and idyllic midwestern settings were compelling and beautiful, and it asks some of the same questions as "Dark," about fate and destiny and what you'd do over, if you could. It's a little bit of a slow burn, but it pays off if you give it time.

Every summer we would spend a week or two on the Cape...that spells summer to me.

I've also been reading a ton, mostly Diana Gabaldon's Outlander books, which I'd never read, about a time-traveling nurse from the 1940s (hey, I'm sensing a theme here!) and her hot, kilt-wearing Scottish lover. There are seven of them, and they're each about a thousand pages long, and meticulously researched and so engrossing.

Can you tease anything about what you're working on next?!

JW: All I can tell you—which, coincidentally, is all I know so far—is that it's going to be about two women who have the same name, and almost identical email addresses, and how one woman starts getting the other one's email, and becomes interested in—maybe even obsessed with—her life.

Q&A as courtesy of GetLit. Read more at: [GetLiterary.com/Lets-Talk-Lit-Jennifer-Weiner-on-Social-Media-TV-Recs-and-Whats-Next](https://www.getlit.com/lets-talk-lit-jennifer-weiner-on-social-media-tv-recs-and-whats-next)

Big Summer Recipes



Daphne's Banana Bread

Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1–1 ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ¾ tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp nutmeg
- 3 ripe bananas, mashed
- ¼ cup full-fat Greek yogurt or sour cream
- 2 eggs
- 6 Tbsp unsalted butter, softened
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ¾ cup chocolate chips
- turbinado sugar for sprinkling

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Grease and flour a loaf pan and set aside
2. Toast walnuts for 5 minutes, or until fragrant. Let cool
3. Combine flour, sugar, baking soda, salt, and nutmeg in a large bowl
4. In a medium bowl, mix mashed banana, yogurt, eggs, butter, and vanilla
5. Fold banana mixture into dry ingredients
6. Add chocolate chips and walnuts until well combined
7. Pour mixture into prepared pan and sprinkle top with turbinado sugar to taste
8. Bake for 50–60 minutes or until golden brown. A toothpick should come out clean
9. Let cool for 5 minutes and serve warm with a glass of milk or tea or coffee



Big Summer Recipes



The Very Best Dark & Stormy

Ingredients

- 2 oz dark rum
(plus a little extra for good luck)
- 3 oz ginger beer
- 1/2 oz lime juice
- Lime wedge for garnish

Method

1. Fill a tall glass with ice
2. Pour ginger beer and lime juice
3. Float rum at top of glass
4. Garnish with a lime wedge. Enjoy!

The Frozen Daphne

A FROTHY SUMMER MOCKTAIL

Ingredients

- 1 oz lemon juice
- 2 oz pineapple juice
- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen mango
- orange slice for garnish

Method

1. Combine mango, lemon and pineapple juices in blender
2. Blend on high, then add lots of ice and blend until smooth
3. Pour into your favorite fancy glass
4. Garnish with an orange slice, lift your pinky, and enjoy!



Daphne's Favorite NYC Restaurants



1. **Himalayan Yak**
HimalayanYak.net
2. **Sahadi's**
Sahadis.com
3. **Tripoli**
TripoliRestaurant.com
4. **Sarabeth's**
SarabethsRestaurants.com
5. **Sabrett hot dogs**
Sabrett.com
6. **Ben & Jerry's**
BenJerry.com/104th-Broadway
7. **Russ & Daughters**
RussandDaughters.com
8. **La Goulue**
LaGoulueEestaurant.com
9. **Ladurée**
Laduree.us

Our favorite quotes from the book! What are yours?

"Finally, I looked again, and this time, instead of seeing cellulite or rolls, or arms or thighs, I saw a woman with shiny hair and bright red lips; a woman who'd dive in the deep end and smile for the camera

and live her life out in the open, as if she had just as much right to the world as anyone else."



"She was beautiful, and funny, and glamorous; a long, unfurled ribbon of cool, where I was a sweaty pretzeled knot of striving."



"If you had asked me that morning who I was, I might have talked about being a college student, an aspiring artist, a daughter or a friend; a lover of romance novels and needle felting, French bulldogs and Lynda Barry comics. But if I'd been honest, I would have said, I'm a dieter."



"[We] filled our plates with lobster and clams and corn on the cob, and returned to our spot on the silky rugs in front of the fire at the farthest reaches of the party,

in a nook that seemed custom-made for two."



"His lips were gentle, tentative at first, barely brushing against mine. He tasted like whiskey and salt."



"Drops of water hung, sparkling, suspended in the air, and the sky stretched, vast and brilliant, behind us. She looked—we both looked—young and beautiful. Only one of us would stay that way forever."



Download and share some of the best quotes from the book!

#BigSummer

How to Spend the Perfect Weekend in Cape Cod

Stroll down historic Main Street toward **Chatham Light** and stop by **Where the Sidewalk Ends Bookstore**.

If you're visiting the Outer Cape, **Provincetown Bookshop** and **East End Books** are perfect places to pick up your next beach read!

Take a breezy ride down the scenic route along the **Cape Cod Rail Trail**, one of the best bike trails in New England.

Spend the day soaking up the sun at **Long Nook Beach**, then catch one of the most picturesque sunsets on the New England coast.

Head to **Wellfleet**, where you can explore Cape Cod's biggest and best flea market and be spoiled for choice between mini golf or the drive-in theatre with nightly double features.

Indulge in the fried clams and onion rings at **Arnold's** before treating yourself to refreshing homemade ice cream at **Sweet Escape**.

Check out the eclectic art featured in the **Left Bank Gallery**.

Enjoy unforgettable live entertainment (drag brunch, anyone?) at the **Crown & Anchor** in Provincetown.

