

HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!

All you need is a little bit of organization and some friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends. Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with six to eight people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

Figure out when and where you want to meet.

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's your group and so you get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

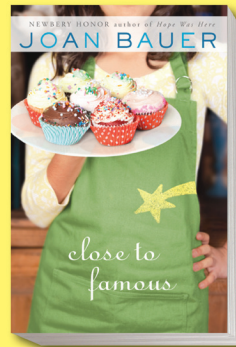
Decide how you will choose books and how the discussions will be run.

Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just all get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians.

MAKE FOSTER'S VANILLA CUPCAKES!



Close to Famous
Ages 10 up • Grade 5 up
978-0-670-01282-4 • \$16.99 • HC
978-0-14-242017-1 • \$6.99 • PB

In one bowl, sift cake flour with baking powder and salt. In another bowl, cream butter and sugar with mixer. Beat in eggs and vanilla until creamy. Add cake flour mixture a little at a time with the milk until well blended and fluffy. Fold in coconut. Fill cupcake liners 2/3 full. Makes around 15.

Bake at 350 for 20–25 minutes. Let cupcakes cool on rack. Pile on the vanilla frosting.

Vanilla Frosting

1 box confectioners sugar
1/2 cup butter softened (1 stick)
3–4 tsp milk or, if you want it extra special,
instead of milk add 3 1/2 tbslp half and half
1 tsp vanilla

Combine all in a bowl, and beat with your mixer for two minutes until creamy.



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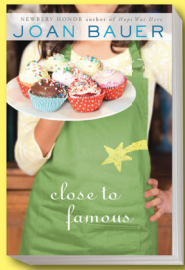
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

NEWBERY HONOR author of *Hope Was Here*
JOAN BAUER



ABOUT THE BOOK



Foster McFee and her mother escape to a small West Virginia town after her mother's ex-boyfriend Hank, an Elvis impersonator, abuses her mother. Foster dreams of having her own cooking show and uses baking as a coping mechanism for dealing with the loss of her father and her inability to read. The small town inhabitants embrace Foster and her mother, who receive harassing phone calls from Hank. Foster finds

new friends in Macon, a starstruck errand boy for the aging star Miss Charleena, a father figure in Lester, a listener and teacher in Miss Charleena, and inspiration in Perseverance Wilson. Foster starts her own baking business and cooks for families who are visiting loved ones in the local prison. As she adjusts to new surroundings, Foster confronts her biggest fear—her inability to read.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joan Bauer, critically acclaimed author of ten books for young people, including the Newbery Honor book *Hope Was Here*, grew up in River Forest, Illinois, and nurtured secret hopes of becoming a comedienne. Winner of numerous awards for her writing, she is a coveted keynote speaker for schools and professional organizations. Known for her engaging humor and precise use of language, she has won the hearts of teens and teachers across the country. She lives and bakes in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband and their intrepid wheaten terrier, Max.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Close to Famous* opens with Foster and her mother being chased out of Memphis by “Elvis” in a yellow Cadillac. What has happened and where are they going?
- Foster and her mother almost drive over a cliff; however, they are pulled to safety by Gotcha Towing. The owners of the tow truck, Kitty and Lester, gravitate toward Foster and her mother and allow them to stay in their mobile home behind their house. Why do Kitty and Lester connect with Foster and her mother?
- Foster idolizes Sonny Kroll, a well-known Food Network cook, and dreams of having her own Food Network show. Sonny teaches his viewers “to go with what you’ve got” when making a meal. How is his advice a metaphor for Foster’s bravery? Why do you think Foster idolizes Sonny?
- The Church of God is for sale in the small West Virginia town of Culpepper, where Foster and her mother settle, and Perseverance Wilson opposes the sale. What role does the possible selling of the church play in creating the story’s setting? What role does it play in the plot?
- Foster had not heard of Miss Charleena, but she learns from her mother that the aging actress is “famous.” Analyze the scene in which Macon is introducing Foster to Miss Charleena. What words and/or phrases in this scene create a humorous tone?
- What inferences can you make from Foster’s mother’s decision to return to Memphis? What does the outcome of the trip say about her character?
- Bauer provides information about Foster’s life before she and her mother move to West Virginia through flashback. Cite at least one example of flashback and explain how the information shapes the reader’s understanding of Foster and how it moves the story forward.
- Is “Angry Wayne” a fitting name for the owner of the diner? Why or why not? What do you make of Perseverance Wilson’s name? What contributions do other names make to the story/characters?
- Is Miss Charleena a complex character? (E.g., does she have multiple or conflicting motivations?) Why or why not?
- In what ways are Foster and Miss Charleena alike? How do these similarities contribute to their ability to work together?
- Foster has negative memories of a dress her mother bought for her in sixth grade. Why does Miss Charleena insist that she wear it?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Bauer is known for wonderful examples of wordplay. Foster is haunted by a former teacher’s use of the word “limited” in describing her academic ability. How does Miss Charleena alter that meaning? Find another word or phrase in the story and analyze the impact on the story’s meaning.
- Foster has lost her father and is convinced she cannot learn to read or write. Why is she able to tackle reading in Culpepper, given her fear and negative experiences in former schools?
- Foster’s closing act for her dream show is, “I want to tell all you kids out there who are watching me, life gets hard sometimes. Just don’t give up, okay? Don’t give up on your dreams. And remember, when your heart is ready to break, that’s the perfect time to bake” (p. 48). What does this statement indicate about Foster’s character?
- Chapter 13 opens with, “I’m here, world, and I’ve got baked goods” (p. 91). What does this opening line indicate about Foster?
- As Foster and Lester fish, Lester says, “Waiting is a powerful thing. Most folks today just rush off to get things done. You learn to wait, my young friend. You learn to wait and listen and not to be afraid of the quiet” (p. 186). How is this advice helpful to Foster? What does Foster’s statement, “Broken places need something to fill them in” (p. 188), suggest about her and her developing relationship with Lester?
- Perseverance Wilson is a source of inspiration for Foster. Why does Foster tell her she does not deserve her middle name (Akilah, which means “intelligent one who reasons”)? What advice does Perseverance give Foster? How might you respond to a friend who made such a statement?
- How does the small West Virginia town change Foster? What impact does she have on its inhabitants?
- One can argue that perseverance is a recurring theme in *Close to Famous*. Find several passages that support this argument. How does the concept of perseverance weave the story together?
- Describe how Foster changes throughout the story.
- Baking phrases such as “It’s okay if you mess up” are metaphors for how we can live our lives and cope with adversity. Identify additional expressions in baking scenes throughout the book and explain their multiple meanings. Do you agree or disagree with Foster’s philosophy?
- Can you think of phrases and/or terminology associated with other hobbies/sports that can be used as metaphors for living? (E.g. baseball)