

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

Author of *The Female of the Species*

MINDY MCGINNIS

HEROINE

HEROINE

HEROIN

HERO

HER

A captivating and powerful exploration of the opioid crisis—the deadliest drug epidemic in American history—through the eyes of a college-bound softball star.

Edgar Award-winning author Mindy McGinnis delivers a visceral and necessary novel about addiction, family, friendship, and hope.

When a car crash sidelines Mickey just before softball season, she has to find a way to hold on to her spot as the catcher for a team expected to make a historic tournament run. Behind the plate is the only place she's ever felt comfortable, and the painkillers she's been prescribed can help her get there.

The pills do more than take away pain; they make her feel good.

With a new circle of friends—fellow injured athletes, others with just time to kill—Mickey finds peaceful acceptance, and people with whom words come easily, even if it is just the pills loosening her tongue.

But as the pressure to be Mickey Catalan heightens, her need increases, and it becomes less about pain and more about want, something that could send her spiraling out of control.

Mindy McGinnis is an Edgar award-winning novelist who writes across multiple genres including, post-apocalyptic, historical, thriller, contemporary, mystery, and fantasy.

While her settings may change, you can always count on Mindy's books to deliver grit, truth, and an unflinching look at humanity and the world around us.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Questions for the Beginning of the Book

1. Before you start reading the book, what are your attitudes and beliefs about drug addiction, drug use, and, most importantly, drug addicts? Maybe find an article about drug use involving a celebrity or a local issue and talk with a partner what you think about what you read. Why do you think the person got involved in drugs? How do you feel about what they did? What kinds of judgement statements do you find yourself making?
2. After reading to page 3, what questions do you have about the characters and how they got to this point?
3. What makes Mickey feel like she's an outsider to her classmates and teammates?
4. How does Mickey's situation with her family make things more difficult?
5. Why is it so important to Mickey that she recovers in time for her season? Think about what this means for her and for others. Do you agree that it is as important as she thinks it is? Why or why not?
6. Mickey starts lying to people about her recovery prognosis on page 30. How does this contribute to the rest of the events of the story? Why does Mickey lie to people? Her teammates? Her family? Herself?
7. On page 41, Mickey talks about what all the Oxy does for her. What does the Oxy do for her? How does it give her more than just pain relief? Do you think this contributes to her using the drug more?
8. On page 54-55, Mickey talks about some of the ways she views pain. How does this influence the way she handles her new pain?
9. On page 69, Mickey justifies using pills. What are some of the ways she justifies her drug use? What do you think about these justifications? Do any of them make sense to you?
10. Big Ed expresses some common attitudes about drug users in chapters 12 and 18. Have you heard statements like this before? How do you understand drug use differently looking at it through Mickey's experience?
11. On page 91, Mickey says, "I'm not taking Oxy because it makes me feel good. I'm taking it for other people." How is that true for her at this stage of the book?

## Questions for the Middle of the Book

1. Devra is a recovering addict. What is her relationship with drugs like? How does it influence her choices? How do people respond to this?
2. People praise Mickey's progress at physical therapy, the weight room, and the doctor's office. Her reaction to that praise is complicated. What is her reaction? Why is it complicated? How does this contribute to her not confessing her problems sooner?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Questions for the Middle of the Book (continued)

3. How do the Galarza's view drugs? Mickey says, "Because if Carolina is strong and smart, then what would the Galarzas have to say about me?" Is it true that Mickey isn't strong and isn't smart? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.
4. How do you usually imagine a drug dealer? How is Edith different from the way most drug dealers are portrayed?
5. On pages 150-153, Mickey recounts a story about playing softball with Lana when she was younger. How were Mickey and Lana different? What makes her think of the story now?
6. At the end of chapter 23, Mickey says, "Right now, I'm not me. And I'm so damn happy." How is the Oxy allowing her to be someone she's normally not?
7. At the end of chapter 24, Mickey examines what all she has to lose if she admits to her mom that she has a problem. What all does she think she has to lose? Why does this make it seem more logical to her to just keep the problem to herself? Do you think she has evaluated the situation correctly?
8. How does the trauma of Mickey's parents divorce hurt her?
9. Sometimes we characterize drug addicts as lazy and unproductive members of society. In the middle of the book, is this true of Mickey? Is she lazy and unproductive?
10. What is the difference between Oxy and heroin according to Josie in chapter 34? Why do you think Mickey is hesitant to make the jump from using Oxy to heroin? Ultimately, why does she make that choice?
11. Who is Patrick? Describe the way he treats Mickey and Josie. Why do you think he treats them this way?
12. How has Mickey's relationship with drugs changed by the end of chapter 39?
13. On page 293, Mickey says she can honestly say that she is okay. Why does she think she is okay? Do you agree that she is okay? Why or why not?
14. Where do you think "the wheels come off the cart"? When does Mickey start to lose control of her addiction? When does it start to affect her performance in a negative way?
15. Do people suspect that something's wrong? How do you know? Point to specific evidence in the text. What do you think prevents those people from digging more and finding out what's going on?
16. What other substances does Mickey use to try to hold everything together? How do these solutions to the side effects of drug use make things harder for her?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

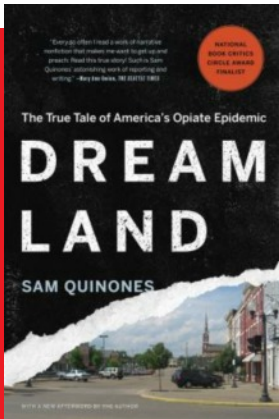
## Questions for the End of the Book

1. After Josie, Luther, and Derrick die, Mickey calls Patrick and Edith. What are their responses? Do they surprise you? If so, how? Whose response do you think was worse for Mickey? Why?
2. Mickey says something is almost as good as heroin at the end of chapter 53. What is it? Why do you think it helps? Do you think it would help anyone?
3. Mickey says on page 392, “I wonder if I’d loved heroin a little less, what could have happened between us (Luther).” She makes it sound as if she could have turned off her relationship with heroin and just chosen something else. Is this a fair assessment? Why or why not?
4. On page 394, Mickey talks about all the ways her privacy has been violated by her parents, and she no longer has her family’s trust. What are some of the things that have happened? How would most teenagers respond to her family’s actions? How is Mickey’s response different? Why is her response different?
5. On page 395, Mickey’s mom says of Josie, Luther, and Derrick, “They weren’t really your friends, Mickey. Not if they let you do what you did. Real friends would’ve stopped you.” What do you think of this statement? Do you think Josie, Luther, and Derrick were Mickey’s friends? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
6. On page 398, Lydia tells Mickey that she’s her heroine. What makes Mickey a heroine by the end of the story?
7. Each chapter begins with a word that is important to the chapter. Look through them. Which five of the words are most important to the story as a whole? Which five words are most important to Mickey? Be prepared to defend your answer using the text.
8. On page 33, Mickey’s dance teacher encouraged students to “Pick one thing, and do it well.” Mickey threw herself entirely into softball, which was the primary way she defined herself. Is this good advice? How did Mickey’s singular definition of herself make her recovery harder?
9. People sometimes equate drug use to selfishness. “Well, I guess they liked drugs more than they liked their family/their job/their success.” Was Mickey’s drug use always just for her? How does this change the way you view the path to addiction?



# COMPANION RESOURCES

## Further Reading

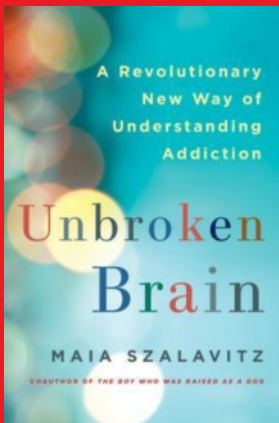


### **Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic**

by Sam Quinones

ISBN13: 9781620402528

In 1929, in the blue-collar city of Portsmouth, Ohio, a company built a swimming pool the size of a football field; named Dreamland, it became the vital center of the community. Now, addiction has devastated Portsmouth, as it has hundreds of small rural towns and suburbs across America--addiction like no other the country has ever faced. How that happened is the riveting story of Dreamland.



### **The Biology of Desire: Why Addiction Is Not a Disease**

by Marc Lewis

ISBN13: 9781610394376

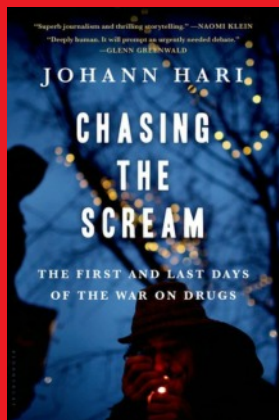
Lewis reveals addiction as an unintended consequence of the brain doing what it's supposed to do--seek pleasure and relief--in a world that's not cooperating. As a result, most treatment based on the disease model fails. Lewis shows how treatment can be retooled to achieve lasting recovery. This is enlightening and optimistic reading for anyone who has wrestled with addiction either personally or professionally.

### **Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction**

by Maia Szalavitz

ISBN13: 9781250055828

Combining Maia Szalavitz's personal story with a distillation of more than 25 years of science and research, Unbroken Brain provides a paradigm-shifting approach to thinking about addiction.



### **In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction**

by Gabor Maté

ISBN13: 9780676977400

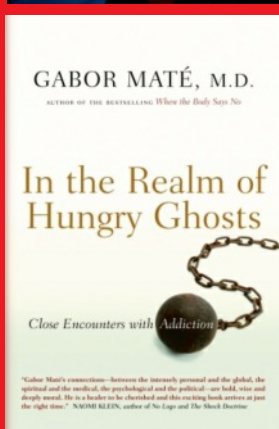
Maté looks to the root causes of addiction, applying a clinical and psychological view to the physical manifestation and offering some enlightening answers for why people inflict such catastrophe on themselves.

### **Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs**

by Johann Hari

ISBN13: 9781620408902

Hari set off on an epic three-year, thirty-thousand-mile journey into the war on drugs. What he found is that more and more people all over the world have begun to recognize startling truths.



### **How to Stop Time: Heroin from A to Z**

by Ann Marlowe

ISBN13: 9780385720168

In this hypnotic and piercingly intelligent chronicle, Ann Marlowe dissects her former heroin habit, and recounts in harrowing detail the rigors and realities of life under the influence while building a successful Wall Street career.

### **The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit**

by Bruce K. Alexander

ISBN13: 9780199230129

Addiction is increasing globally, and the conventional remedies don't work. Arguing that the cause of this failure to control addiction is that treatments have focused too single-mindedly on the afflicted individual addict, this book presents a radical rethink about the nature of addiction.

# COMPANION RESOURCES

## Health & Addiction Resources

### **Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration: [samhsa.gov](https://samhsa.gov)**

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. SAMHSA devotes its resources, including programs, information, and data, to help people act on the knowledge that behavioral Health is essential to health; prevention works; treatment is effective; people recover from mental and substance use disorders.

SAMHSA's site features a treatment locator, a helpline (800-662-HELP), a suicide prevention hotline (800-273-TALK), as well as educational material spanning prevention, treatment, and recovery.

### **National Institute on Drug Abuse: [drugabuse.gov](https://drugabuse.gov)**

NIDA is a federal scientific research institute under the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Their mission is to advance science on the causes and consequences of drug use and addiction and to apply that knowledge to improve individual and public health.

NIDA's site features educational resources for parents, teachers, kids and teens, family and friends of addicts, as well as resources for those struggling with drug abuse themselves.

NIDA For Teens <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/> has the latest on how drugs affect the brain and body, featuring videos, games, and blog posts relevant to teens.

### **Narcotics Anonymous: <https://na.org/>**

NA is a nonprofit society of people for whom drugs have become a major problem. Recovering addicts meet regularly to help each other stay clean.

NA's site features literature about the program as well as a meeting locator.

### **Alcoholics Anonymous: [aa.org](https://aa.org)**

AA is an international fellowship for people who have had a drinking problem. It is nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial, apolitical, and available almost everywhere. There are no age or education requirements.

Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about their drinking problem. AA's site features program information, video and audio PSA's as well as a meeting locator.

### **Al-Anon & Alateen: [al-anon.org](https://al-anon.org)**

Offering help and hope for families and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon and Alateen members are people who have been affected by someone else's drinking. They are parents, children, spouses, partners, brothers, sisters, other family members, friends, employers, employees, and coworkers of alcoholics.

Site offers a FAQ, First Steps Podcast, member resources, and meeting locators for both Al-anon and Alateen meetings.

### **SMART Recovery: Self-Management And Recovery Training [smartrecovery.org](https://smartrecovery.org)**

SMART Recovery is an abstinence-based, not-for-profit organization with a sensible self-help program for people having problems with drinking and using. It includes ideas and techniques to help change your lives from self-destructive and unhappy to constructive and satisfying. Teaches common sense self-help procedures designed to empower users to abstain and to develop a more positive lifestyle.

Extensive site offers treatment programs and providers locator, suggested reading list, urgent help resources, as well as an online community forum and message board.