

A Hundred Summers

by Beatriz Williams

Discussion Questions

1. The main narrative of *A Hundred Summers* takes place in an old money enclave in Rhode Island during the summer of the great New England hurricane of 1938. Why do you think the author chose this setting? What kind of changes were taking place in American society at the time, and how did those influence the plot and characters? What role do you think the storm played, both as a dramatic device and to convey the novel's themes?
2. What did you think of Lily Dane? How do you think she developed as a character during the course of the novel? Did you find her essential innocence a strength or a weakness? How did her thoughts and actions in Seaview compare to her thoughts and actions in the other settings?
3. The friendship between Lily and Budgie forms the backbone of the novel, both in 1931 and in 1938. What did you think of the dynamic between the two women? How did it change and develop in the course of the narrative? Was Lily right to accept Budgie's overture of friendship after her marriage to Nick? Would you call this a toxic relationship? Who do you think needed the other the most?
4. What do you think motivates Budgie? Do you consider her a bad person or only a troubled one? Do you think she really cares for Lily? Did the author convey her character effectively, or was she too ambiguous? How do you see her in the context of the historical period, and the changing status of women in the 1920s and 1930s?
5. Nick Greenwald appears in both 1931 and 1938 as the love interest for both women. How did Nick change between his college years and adulthood? Why do you think he married Budgie? Would you be able to forgive him for this decision, and for his activities in Paris in the years between?
6. Nick's Jewish heritage is presented as a barrier to social acceptance among Lily's family and social connections. Do you think this accurately represents the attitudes of that time and society? How do you think the perception of Jews in America compared to the position in Europe, and how would Nick's attitude to antisemitism have been affected by the prolonged periods he spent overseas? How did Nick's ambiguous status - Jewish father, Episcopalian mother - affect his self-perception and his actions in the novel?
7. What did you think of Graham Pendleton? Did he really love Lily? What do you think both Budgie and Graham were looking for in their relationships with Lily? Would Graham have

been able to reform if he married Lily?

8. Until the end of the book, Lily's mother remains offscreen, or viewed from a distance. Why do you think the author chose to keep her veiled and ambiguous? What did you think of her? How do you think Lily's character was influenced by her relationship with her mother? If your partner underwent the same kind of trauma as Lily's father did in the First World War, how might the terms of your marriage change over time?

9. Did the novel conclude too conveniently for you, or did the fates of the various characters make sense given their actions and propensities? Do you think events like hurricanes happen 'for a reason', or are they 'random and senseless'? Have you experienced a devastating storm, or an unexpected tragedy? How did it affect you and/or your family and community, both short and long term?

10. Re-read the poem at the beginning of the novel. What do you think it means? How does it relate to the narrative and theme of *A Hundred Summers*? What is the message you take away from reading the book?