

## Thwong

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why doesn't A.J.'s father support her dream of being a great photographer? Why is it important to A.J. that he does?

- When the story begins, how does A.J. feel about love? Are her feelings realistic? Are her expectations realistic? How do her feelings change as the story progresses?

- Is Jonathan a helpful force in A.J.'s life? Is he good at what he does? What does he think A.J. should do?

- What kind of friend is Trish? Do you think that she understands A.J.? Is A.J. a good friend to Trish?

## Sticks

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What makes Mickey a good pool player? What changes allow him to finally win the nine-ball championship?

- Why does Mickey's mother have so much trouble trusting Joseph Alvarez? Do you think she is right to be wary of him? Who does Mickey have to learn to trust?

- Why is it important to Mickey to win the competition? Do the other characters agree with his views on competition? What do you think about his desire to win?

- Discuss Mickey's relationships with his friends and family. Does Joseph Alvarez offer anything to Mickey besides pool lessons? What does Mickey give back to each person?

## Stand Tall

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Grandpa's life is forever changed by the Vietnam War, and he talks about it often. How do his experiences in Vietnam affect his family and his life now? What aspects of Tree's life does he liken to a war? What lessons can we learn from soldiers like Grandpa?

- What is it that defines Tree? Does his nickname fit him? Do you think that he chose the right motto for his life?

- What is Sophie fighting against? Why do she and Tree get along so well? In what ways does she help him?

- How does the flood change Tree? His family? The other people in the town?

## Squashed

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is growing pumpkins so important to Ellie? Is it important to her to win? Is there anything else in her life that connects her to other people and other times like growing does?

- Why doesn't Ellie's father want her to grow pumpkins? How does his choice of career change how he feels about Ellie's pursuits?

- How does Ellie feel about talking to Max? In what ways is this similar to talking to her mother's grave? What good comes from each of these "conversations"?

- What makes Wes different from the other boys in town? Why does Ellie connect with him so easily?

## Rules of the Road

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why do you think that Mrs. Gladstone chooses Jenna to be her driver? How does Jenna's personality help her on the trip? How does her age help her? Is there anything that makes Jenna unsuitable for helping Mrs. Gladstone?

- When Jenna begins her trip, what does she think a person needs to be strong? Does this change as she travels?

- What significance does Harry Bender have to Jenna? What does he represent to the other characters? Do you think the outcome of the story would have been different if he had lived?

- What does Jenna think makes a good salesperson? In what ways do these traits affect how she lives her life?

## Hope Was Here

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why does the main character choose the name Hope? How does this name affect the way she lives? How different is it from the name her mother chose? What name would you choose for yourself, given the chance?

- What lessons does Deena teach Hope about waitressing? Do these lessons have any bearing on real life?

- What makes Aunt Addie a better guardian than Deena? Does Hope lose anything by being raised by her aunt? What does having a father mean to Hope? Does G.T. fulfill these requirements?

- Why does wearing the red clown nose make Hope feel so much better? Is there anything else in her life that serves this same purpose?

## Backwater

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why is history so important to Ivy? What are the positive and negative things it brings to her life?

- What do you think defines the members of a family—is it strictly genetics or is there something else? Who doesn't "belong" in the Breedlove family? What traits connect Josephine and Ivy to the other Breedloves?

- After hearing about Mountain Mama's family, Ivy concludes that "everyone's got a deep hurt somewhere." What is Ivy's deep hurt? What deep hurts are the other characters carrying?

- What does Ivy learn at Aunt Josephine's? Is this what she set out to learn? Do any of the other characters benefit from her journey?

## Best Foot Forward

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why has Jenna started going to Al-Anon meetings again? Why do you think that she feels she needs to fix things for herself and the people she loves? Is this trait always a bad one?

- Why does Mrs. Gladstone give Tanner so many chances? How does Jenna feel about this? What does Tanner bring to Gladstone that other people can't provide?

- Who takes the blame for the sweatshop scandal? Who should take the blame? What do you think will happen to Gladstone Shoes in the future?

- What does Mrs. Gladstone mean by "Best Foot Forward"? Is this how everyone else interprets the slogan? In what ways is Jenna putting her best foot forward?

## Peeled

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why do you think that publishing the truth is so important to Hildy? Can you think of an instance in the real world where false reporting led to unexpected consequences?

- What does Hildy see in Zack that she doesn't see in Lev or Nathan? Why do you think she's so hesitant about getting involved with him romantically?

- One of the lessons that Minska teaches Hildy is about the harmful effects of propaganda. What examples of propaganda do we see in the novel? How does this affect morale in Banessville?

- Baker tells Hildy that "the future of the world depends on how many people are mature enough to be nonconformists." Do you think that it's responsible or appropriate for an adult mentor to be teaching his students to revolt? Why or why not?

## Rules of Good Journalism

Don't shortchange an interview. Ask all the questions you can—you never know what might come out!

Keep good eye contact. It shows confidence.

Confirm everything—during the first twenty-four hours of any breaking story, about half the facts are wrong.

Less is more—less description, more facts. Only describe it if it means something.

If you don't take yourself seriously, the person you're interviewing won't either.

If it ever gets easy, do something else!

# How to start your own Reading Group

Think it would be hard to start your own reading group? 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 6–8 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 local library, school 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, or on the beach. 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.

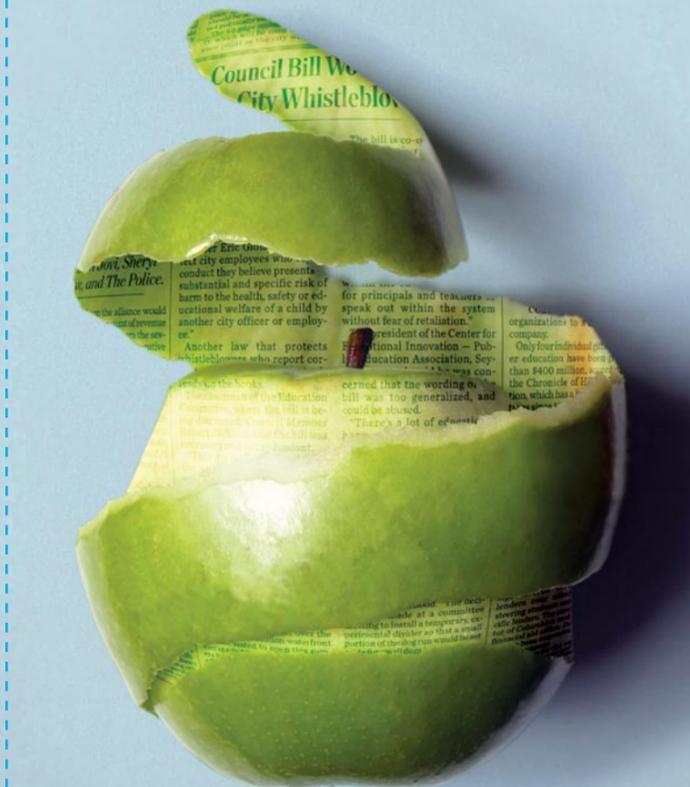
### DECIDE HOW YOU WILL CHOOSE BOOKS, AND HOW THE DISCUSSIONS WILL BE RUN.

This is another one that sounds a little scary but totally isn't. 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 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, school 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 INFORMATION, VISIT:  
WWW.PENGUIN.COM/YOUNGREADERS

# JOAN BAUER



Stories ripe for the picking...

**JOAN BAUER** gives us the juicy details on her favorite characters, words of inspiration, and the joy of writing.

**IN *PEELED*, HILDY FINDS INSPIRATION AS A JOURNALIST FROM HER LATE FATHER, OFTEN WRITING TO MAKE HIM PROUD. AS AN AUTHOR, WHO ARE YOUR INSPIRATIONS?**

My grandmother is an enduring inspiration to me – she was a storyteller, quite famous in her day, and knew how to tell a story that could make people laugh and cry while poking gentle fun at the world’s absurdities. As a writer, one novel has inspired me more than any other—*To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. I still go back to that story to learn how to create memorable characters and put them in a setting that will stand the test of time. As far as being inspired by journalists, I grew up in Chicago and was a huge Mike Royko fan (he wrote for the *Sun Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*). Royko was tough and funny and that combination really caused his voice to be heard. I was greatly inspired as a young adult by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward’s investigative reporting at the *Washington Post* during the Watergate years. What a time that was in our country, and these two young reporters sniffed out the biggest political story of the decade and ran with it against the odds. I suppose I gave some of their courage to Hildy Biddle, my sixteen-year-old reporter in *Peeled*.

**PEELED HAS A MYSTERY ANGLE TO IT. HOW WAS WRITING *PEELED* DIFFERENT THAN WRITING YOUR OTHER NOVELS?**

I found writing an actual mystery to be very difficult at first. In some ways, I believe, all novels are mysteries in that the author leaves clues for the readers about the story and the characters. But plotting an actual mystery challenged me. When I write I’m not always sure where the story is going, but with a mystery, you have to know in advance and lay down those clues, so I was forced to think a great deal about plot early on. Once I did, though, I had great fun thinking through all the elements of intrigue and misrepresentation. I found out that I’m much sneakier than I actually knew! I had great fun crafting Hildy Biddle’s character and realized that part of the way she learns is through trial and error as a journalist, so I have her growth as a journalist intersecting with the growth of the fear happening in town. I found that to be a fascinating way to develop the plot.

**YOUR CHARACTERS ALL HAVE MOTTOES, LIFE GOALS, OR RULES TO LIVE BY. WHAT WORDS HAVE RESONATED IN YOUR LIFE?**

One of the things I tried to show in *Peeled* is how words have such power for good or for bad. Hildy enters a kind of war of words—she’s trying to find and write the truth, while frightening slogans, headlines, and signs are being displayed all around town.

**WHICH OF YOUR CHARACTERS IS YOUR FAVORITE? WHICH ONE WAS THE HARDEST TO WRITE?**

Every time I’m asked this question, I seem to add another character. Honestly, I don’t have an all-time favorite one, but I do have some special relationships with Jonathan the cupid in *Thwonk*; Jenna, Mrs. Gladstone, and Harry Bender in *Rules of the Road* and *Best Foot Forward*; Ivy in *Backwater*; Grandpa in *Stand Tall*; Hope and G.T. in *Hope Was Here*; and now Hildy and Baker Polton in *Peeled*. I’ve always said that I can tell when I’ve got a real character by how hard it is to say good-bye. My secret fantasy is that I could throw a party at the Welcome Stairways Diner and invite all my favorite characters to dinner.

## Get to the core of JOAN BAUER



Joan Bauer was born on July 12, 1951, and grew up in River Forest, IL. It was here that she first fell in love with comedy, and nurtured secret hopes of becoming a comedienne. She had a career in sales and marketing, but decided that she would be happier writing, and switched careers shortly after getting married. A serious auto accident reignited her interest in comedy, and she wrote her first novel, *Squashed*, while recuperating.

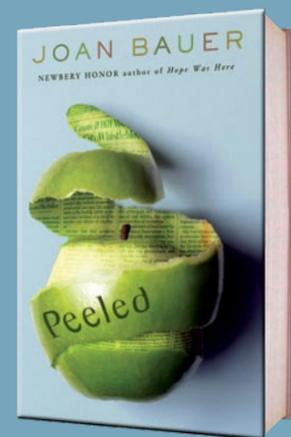
Joan has written nine novels for teens, including *Hope Was Here*, which won a Newbery Honor. Her writing has won numerous other awards as well as winning the hearts of teens across the country. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, computer scientist Evan Bauer, and (when she’s home from college) their no-longer-teenage daughter.

Something’s rotten in the heart of apple country!



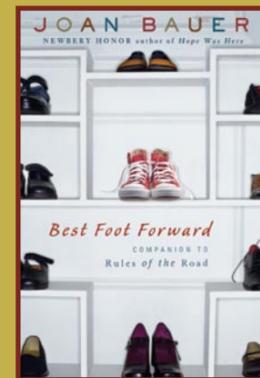
Peeled BY JOAN BAUER

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**Peeled**  
HC: 978-0-399-23475-0  
\$16.99 / \$18.50 CAN

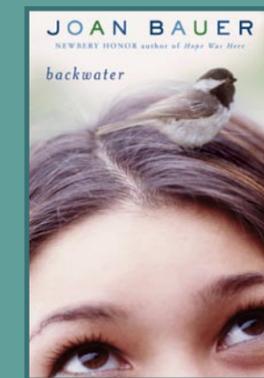
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**Best Foot Forward**  
HC: 978-0-399-23474-3  
\$16.99 / \$25.50 CAN  
PB: 978-0-14-240690-8  
\$7.99 (\$9.00 CAN)

Jenna and Mrs. Gladstone are back in Chicago, but their adventure is only just beginning. Trying to deal with her father’s alcoholism, a complicated new coworker, and the beginning of a romance takes a lot out of Jenna. When it becomes apparent that dirty dealings are afoot at Gladstone, Jenna must decide if she is willing to put every-thing on the line for her beliefs.

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**Backwater**  
HC: 978-0-399-23141-4  
\$18.99 / \$23.50 CAN  
PB: 978-0-14-240434-8  
\$7.99 / \$9.00 CAN

Hoping to find her place in a contentious extended family, Ivy Breedlove turns to the one relative that is supposed to be most like her. Estranged, eccentric, and living on the side of a dangerous mountain, Aunt Josephine supplies Ivy with answers, and teaches her to find the answers within herself.

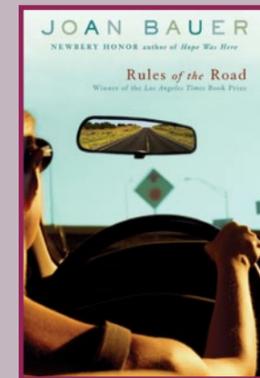
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**Hope Was Here**  
HC: 978-0-399-23142-1  
\$16.99 / \$25.50 CAN  
PB: 978-0-14-240424-9  
\$7.99 / \$9.00 CAN

As a waitress, Hope is used to a lot of things—frequent moves, hard work, bad business deals, and shutting off her emotions. So when she and Aunt Addie move to Wisconsin to work in a diner, Hope isn’t prepared for all that she finds there. As she learns to trust, she finally begins to understand what home means.

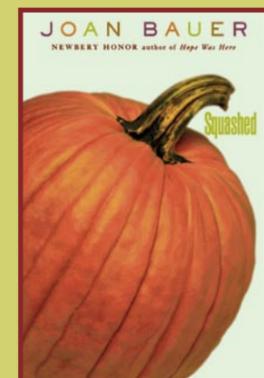
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**Rules of the Road**  
HC: 978-0-399-23140-7  
\$20.99 / \$24.50 CAN  
PB: 978-0-14-240425-6  
\$7.99 (\$9.00 CAN)

Jenna Boller knows how to sell shoes. As her alcoholic father causes her personal life to spin out of control, Jenna focuses on her work at Gladstone Shoe Store. But when Mrs. Gladstone, the cranky old president of Gladstone Shoes, hires Jenna to drive her cross-country, Jenna finds it rewarding to take hold of the wheel and travel down unfamiliar paths.

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**Squashed**  
PB: 978-0-14-240426-3  
\$7.99 / \$9.00 CAN

After years of coming in second place, Ellie Morgan finally has a shot at winning the Rock River Pumpkin weigh-in. If only she can protect Max—her giant squash—from frost, pumpkin thieves, and the bad attitude flowing from her fiercest competitor, Cyril Pool. But how can she concentrate on Max when her father wants her to give up, and there’s a cute new boy taking an interest in her?

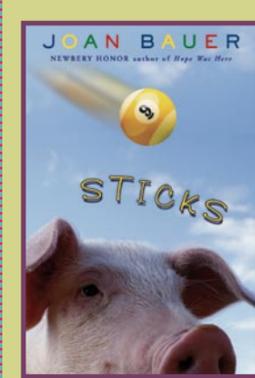
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**Stand Tall**  
HC: 978-0-399-23473-6  
\$16.99 / \$25.50 CAN  
PB: 978-0-14-240427-0  
\$7.99 (\$9.00 CAN)

Life has suddenly become very rough for Tree. His parents have divorced, his Grandpa just had a leg amputated, his dog is getting old, and he has to take ballroom dance lessons. And because Tree is too tall for his age, people forget that he’s only twelve and sometimes needs some help dealing with things. But when disaster strikes his town, Tree discovers that he has a lot to offer.

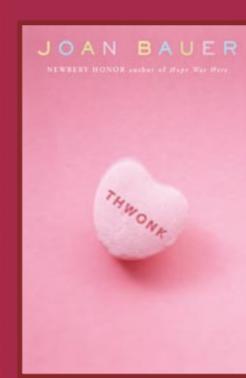
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**Sticks**  
PB: 978-0-14-240428-7  
\$7.99 / \$9.00 CAN

Shooting pool is in Mickey Vernon’s blood. It’s the one thing that connects him to his dead father, a former pool champion, and it’s the one thing that Mickey wants to be best at. Now an old family friend is back in town—one who can help Mickey win the nine-ball championship. If only Mickey can convince his mother to forgive Joseph and let them work together.

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**Thwonk**  
PB: 978-0-14-240429-4  
\$7.99 / \$9.00 CAN

The last thing A.J. McCreary expects in her already stressful life is a pint-sized cupid that only she can see. But when he offers to grant her one wish—love, artistic talent, or academic achievement—she realizes that having her own magical sidekick may not be all bad. Now if she could only decide if she wants to be a great photographer or Peter’s girlfriend. . . .

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