

READERS GUIDE

I was one of the summer people once, years ago. I flew to Nantucket on a foggy November day to visit a wonderful friend. She introduced me to an extremely handsome, smart, witty, tall, blue-eyed man named Charley. Charley and I sat up and talked all night. (About books, of course. Our friend went to bed.)

Two years later, I married Charley and now I've been a year--rounder on Nantucket for thirty--three years. In that time I've become accustomed to the dramatic change between summer and winter on the island.

Islanders have categories for Nantucket's residents. If you were born here, you're a native—the finest kind, the natives call themselves. If you moved here as a child or as an older person, you're a washed--ashore. If your permanent residence is on the island, you're a year--rounder. If you come for the summer, you're a summer person.

The twelve thousand (more or less) year--rounders feel a kind of gritty pride at making it through the challenging island winters. When winter hits we're often isolated, as gale--force winds and blizzards prevent boats or planes from taking us to the mainland. The Atlantic dims without the brightness of the sun. The luxurious flowers, so abundant in the summer, disappear, leaving the gardens as gray as the sky. No chain stores or malls exist on the island. Most of our restaurants close for the season. The wind howls. There's nowhere to go.

But summer is golden. The blue ocean sparkles and gourmet restaurants open and the seas get just enough wind for a good sail out to Great Point to watch the seals basking in the sun.

Then the summer people come to sail and swim and enjoy the long glorious beaches. They come because they're fascinated by the island's unique history and crafts. When they come, they bring a delicious slice of the "real" world with them. They shake us out of our lazy lives and surround us with fascinating gossip and fabulous fashion. They suggest books we should read, films we should see, museums we should visit, and mountains we should hike.

It's tricky, living on an island with twelve thousand people in the winter and sixty thousand in the summer. But because of the summer people, the island enjoys the Nantucket Wine and Food festival, the Nantucket Book Festival, the Nantucket Film Festival, and the Nantucket Comedy Festival. In the summer, we might meet luminaries like Meryl Streep, Ruth Reichl, and Ben Stiller—or, some years, presidential candidates from both sides of the ticket. Drew Barrymore, Johnny Depp, Bill Belichick, and Vice President Biden stroll our streets and eat in our restaurants. Generous summer people throw fabulous parties to celebrate the island's causes and organizations, including our small but essential hospital, arts groups, nature conservancies, and—never to be overlooked—Safe Harbor, our animal rescue shelter.

The summer people keep our island vibrant. Because of them, we have the opportunity to see world-class ballet and hear world-class music. Because of them, our children have jobs as lifeguards at Surfside or as sales clerks in ice cream shops on the wharf. Because of them, we

writers are inspired with new ideas, as we learn—accidentally, of course!—summer secrets. And in June and September, because the summer people hold extraordinarily lavish and glamorous weddings, they remind us how unique and photo-worthy our beautiful island is. (That’s how I knew what I wanted to write my next book on: A Nantucket Wedding.)

Best of all are the returning summer people who brighten our small world with friendships that can last years. We watch their children grow up and they get to know our kids. We get together for lemonade and memories and laughter.

The truth is, by April, the year-rounders are longing for the summer people to return. Really, we’re not unlike the islanders who long ago walked on their widows’s walks to peer out into the horizon, looking for ships filled with loved ones and with silk and spices from distant worlds.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What are the main themes of the novel? Which do you find most thought-provoking?
2. Discuss the Darcy’s relationship with Penny, both before and after Penny passes away. Do you have someone like that in your life? How do they make you feel? How is that person similar to and different from Penny?
3. In chapter 2, it says Darcy “created her own home within books” (page 15). Does this remind you of any other famous characters in literature? What do they have in common in addition to a love of reading?

4. Compare and contrast Nash and Boyz. What do you think attracted Darcy to each of them? How might the story have been different if Darcy had met Nash first?
5. In chapter 4 it says, "Nantucket was a prime spot for people to invent themselves" (page 54). Do you think this is true? Why or why not? What is it about Nantucket that gives it this quality? What other places invoke this feeling?
6. Discuss the significance of the title as it pertains to each character.
7. Discuss Darcy's evolution throughout the story. What lessons does she learn about love? About life?
8. Who would you cast to play each character in a movie adaptation of *Secrets in Summer*? Why?
9. Discuss Darcy's relationship with her home on Nantucket. How does it add to her as a character? Is she different at home than she is at the library?
10. Discuss the parallels between Darcy's relationship with Penny, and Willow's relationship with Darcy.
11. What do you think Darcy means when she says, "If Nash wanted her, he could take her as she was, warts and all" (page 290), at the end of chapter 23?
12. In what ways would the story be different if it had taken place in a different town?