The Breakaway by Jennifer Weiner

Book Discussion Questions

1. In “The Breakaway,” characters often grapple with the idea of choice. Abby must choose between settling into a traditional life as a podiatrist’s wife or pursuing a deeper connection with a man she’s drawn to. Morgan faces a choice that challenges her faith and family ties, while Eileen sends Abby to Camp Golden Hills to ensure she has options in life. Discuss how these characters make their choices and the influence of their personal beliefs and experiences compared to societal expectations. How does the novel contribute to the ongoing discussion of women’s freedom and choice in contemporary America?

2. The term “breakaway” in cycling refers to the moment when a rider separates from the pack to take a lead. What is Abby “breaking away” from in the story? How do other characters also experience their own forms of “breaking away”?

3. Abby finds comfort and acceptance in her relationship with Mark, a man she’s known for most of her life. In contrast, a relationship with Sebastian would push her out of her comfort zone. Is being comfortable in a relationship the same as settling? Is it necessarily a bad thing?

4. Abby’s relationship with her mother, Eileen, is complex and marred by years of body shaming. How do you think Abby’s perception of her mother evolves throughout the story, especially during their time together on the bike trip? Have you experienced or witnessed a similar evolution in real life?

5. The novel features a mix of relationships, including long-term ones like Abby and Mark’s and more recent ones like Abby and Sebastian’s. How does the story explore the dynamics of these relationships? Do you think Abby’s experiences with both Mark and Sebastian help her grow and make her final decision about her romantic future?

6. The older couples on the bike trip reveal unexpected facets of their personalities, including their past as swingers. How does this revelation impact the story and the dynamics within the group? How do these characters challenge stereotypes about older individuals and relationships?

7. Sebastian argues that he did nothing wrong in his online interactions with women because he didn’t misrepresent himself. How do dating apps impact our perception of relationships? Do they encourage authenticity or reward those who perform what they believe potential partners desire? Who bears responsibility in this situation—Alyssa, who assumes men will eventually seek more than just hookups, or Sebastian, who takes her at her word?

8. Abby’s friend, Lizzie, represents an alternative path to a fulfilling life compared to the one Abby saw modeled by her mother and other adults.

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9. What draws Abby to Lizzie's lifestyle, and what makes her apprehensive? How do Abby's values evolve throughout the book?

10. Abby is in her mid-30s, an age when many of her friends are settling down. She resists the conventional path of a desk job, marriage, and suburban living. To what extent is Abby's struggle a timeless one, and how much is it specific to women in their mid-30s today? Did Abby's situation resonate with you or remind you of someone you know? Why or why not?

11. Morgan seeks help from Kayla, an adult outside her family, because she fears her mother's judgment. Establishing trust with adults is crucial for teenagers, but when should adults keep the secrets of someone else's child, and when should they involve the child's parents? Do you think Kayla, Abby, and Eileen made the right decisions? What would you have done in their shoes?

12. The bike trip brings together a group of strangers, and we witness the formation of a surprising and close-knit community by the end of the journey. Explore the theme of building connections and community in the novel. Do we reveal our truest selves among strangers? How do the main characters experience personal growth through conversations with people they've just met?

13. The book explores the concept of secrets and how they can impact relationships and personal growth. Are there secrets in your own life or experiences with others' secrets that you can relate to the characters' experiences in the novel?

14. Jennifer Weiner often incorporates relatable and realistic elements into her novels. Which aspects of "The Breakaway" did you find most relatable or thought-provoking? Are there personal experiences that you connected with while reading the book?

15. Abby's journey during the bike trip is not only physical but also emotional and transformative. How does the experience of leading the trip change her perspective on life, relationships, and her own capabilities? Have you ever had an experience that pushed you out of your comfort zone and led to personal growth?

16. Morgan, the teenage girl on the bike trip, faces a challenging situation related to her sexual health. How does the novel handle this sensitive topic, and how do the characters react to her situation? Have you encountered similar themes in other books or real-life situations?

17. How does Abby's journey toward self-acceptance evolve throughout the story? Are there moments or scenes that particularly resonate with you on this topic?

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18. Without giving away the ending, how did you feel about Abby's final choice in terms of her romantic future? Were you surprised by the outcome, and how did it affect your overall impression of the book?

19. What aspects of "The Breakaway" will stay with you the most?

20. If you could ask Jennifer Weiner one question about "The Breakaway" or her writing process, what would it be?

Source: Luka at wroteabook.org