

# THE GIRLS OF SUMMER

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



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1. How did the storytelling and the alternating timelines affect your reading experience and work to build tension and suspense?
2. Female friendship—and the ways that women rely on one another—is a significant component of this novel. Compare and contrast how Helena and Jules help Rachel come to terms with and accept the truth of her past.
3. In what ways does the island become a character within the novel?
4. When Rachel stays on the island beyond summer, she notices a significant shift in the environment, both seasonally and culturally. How are cycles, death, and rebirth explored as themes throughout the novel?
5. Why do you think Rachel continues to feel strong emotions for Alistair, even after she acknowledges his significant wrongdoings?
6. “I was a seventeen-year-old girl caught up in the attentions of a much older man . . . I had wanted to believe him so badly that I would turn a blind eye to everything” (page 287). Discuss the power dynamics between Henry and Alistair versus between Rachel and her friends, and the ways these dynamics are both manifested and manipulated.
7. The police officers who initially questioned Rachel on the island, all male, made her feel “as though [she is] the one being accused” (page 263). Consider the responses that women receive when they step forward about sexual misconduct, and the rigorous process they must face if they choose to press charges (reliving their traumatic experiences, having wounds reopened to dig for evidence, etc.). Do you think positive change has occurred since the #MeToo movement, and what more needs to be done?
8. Helena says she sought justice so that her daughter could “grow up in a world that’s a bit safer for girls like her” (page 303). What do you think she means by this?
9. Henry Taylor died before he could be prosecuted for his crimes, and Alistair only received a six-year sentence. How did those outcomes make you feel?
10. How did Rachel’s pregnancy and abortion affect her marriage with Tom? How do you think her emotions shifted, if at all, when Alistair said he had known about their baby all along?
11. Rachel’s sense of self was built on the foundation of her summer on the island. Once she realizes her memories are distorted, how does she begin the journey of self-discovery? How do you think she might continue to do so, beyond the page?
12. In what ways are Rachel’s memories of her summer on the island similar to ancient stories? Do you think this novel could be considered its own version of a Greek fable/myth? What can women learn from ancient tales that you could also learn from these characters’ stories?