

*The Book of Summer* discussion questions

1. Did Bess understand, subconsciously or otherwise, that coming home to help her mother move would involve more than a few boxes and some tape?
2. Cissy does and says many unreasonable things. Did you sympathize with her and the problems she has faced? What is at the root of her oftentimes crazy behavior?
3. The theme of “home” is carried throughout the novel. What does “home” mean to the various characters? To Cissy, Bess, and Ruby? What about to Ruby’s husband, Sam?
4. Were you surprised by the revelations about the historical characters, such as Sam, Topper, and Hattie? What about the demise of Hattie and Ruby’s friendship?
5. Ruby and Hattie have a very particular banter when they’re together. Were there any words or expressions you particularly enjoyed?
6. What role did Ruby’s sister-in-law Mary play in the story, and in Ruby’s life?
7. The author has said that she considers this a WWII novel, but one told from a stateside perspective. What does this mean?
8. How did Cliff House evolve over time, both in terms of physical structure and its importance to the various generations of family?
9. How does the present-day situation at Cliff House mirror and contrast with the characters’ lives?
10. Why did someone as accomplished as Bess marry such a horrible man? Is there a difference between the way she presents herself to the world and how she feels on the inside? Was this confusing, or relatable?
11. Why do you think Bess called her mother by her first name? Is this more about Bess, or Cissy, or their relationship as a whole?
12. Were you rooting for Bess and Evan? The ending is ambiguous—where do you see their relationship in one year? In five? Where will Cissy be?
13. Imagine you’re on the town council. Would you vote in favor of Cissy’s proposed bluff restoration project? Or would you let nature take its course, and allow the history of Nantucket (and a sizeable tax base) fall into the sea?
14. What environmental issues are facing your own hometown?