

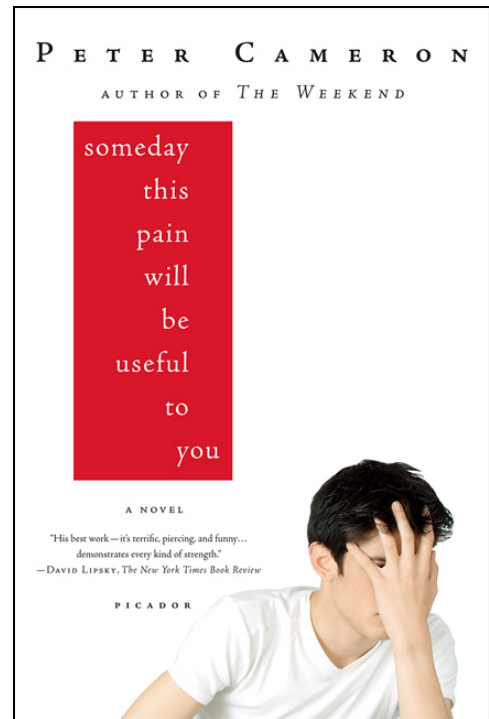
READING GROUP GUIDE

Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You

A Novel

by Peter Cameron

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You*.

About the Book

Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You is the story of James Sveck, a sophisticated, vulnerable young man with a deep appreciation for the world and no idea how to live in it. James is eighteen, the child of divorced parents living in Manhattan. Articulate, sensitive, and cynical, he rejects all of the assumptions that govern the adult world around him—including the expectation that he will go to college in the fall. He would prefer to move to an old house in a small town somewhere in the Midwest. *Someday This Pain Will BE Useful to You* takes place over a few broiling days in the summer of 2003 as James confides in his sympathetic grandmother, stymies

his canny therapist, deplors his pretentious sister, and devises a fake online identity in order to pursue his crush on a much older coworker. Nothing turns out how he'd expected.

In the tradition of *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (*Booklist* has hailed Cameron as “one of the best writers about middle-class youth since Salinger”), Peter Cameron paints an indelible portrait of a teenage hero holding out for a better grownup world.

About the Author

Peter Cameron's fiction has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *Grand Street*. He is the author of the adult novels *The City of Your Final Destination*, *Andorra*, and *The Weekend*. Cameron has also taught courses at Columbia University, Yale University, Sarah Lawrence College, and Oberlin College. He lives in New York City.

Discussion Questions

1. Reflect on the opening quotations. Do they set a tone for the book? How does the Denton Welch quotation expand upon the one from Ovid?
2. James believes adults have the ability to deceive themselves (p. 4). Does James include himself among adults? Why or why not? Does he deceive himself? Is James a reliable narrator?
3. When James is relating emotionally charged scenes, he often digresses or makes observations that seem to be only loosely connected to the subject at hand. What purpose do these digressions/observations serve? What do they reveal about James? What pathos do they add to the scenes? Consider the scene on page 7: James's mother has come home from her honeymoon early and alone, demanding a glass of water. As James watches her drink, he's reminded that birds with their heads tilted back, beaks open, will drown in a rainstorm. Find and discuss other examples.
4. James is always looking at houses on-line. What do you think he is seeking?
5. Why doesn't James want to go to college? How does the “horrible experience” (p. 39) in Washington, D.C. affect his decision? Why does it take so long for James to describe this experience? What is it about Nareem's invitation that propels him to run (pp. 116–117)?
6. Search online for images of the Thomas Cole paintings described on pages 129–131. Discuss James's reaction to them.
7. James likes his coworker, John Webster, very much. Why, then, does James post a false profile on Gent4Gent to entice John? John is hurt and angry and confronts James. How does this episode help James define the man he wants to become?

8. James indicates that one of his favorite people is his grandmother Nanette. Why? Examine his description of her and her house. Is his perception of Nanette influencing his dream of a home in Kansas? What realization about college does James have while sitting in her kitchen?

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