

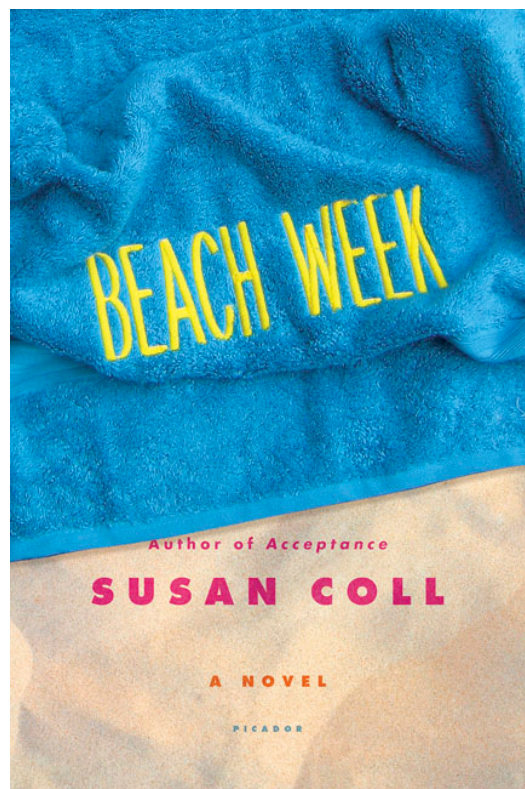
READING GROUP GUIDE

Beach Week

A Novel

by Susan Coll

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Beach Week* 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 *Beach Week*.

About the Book

Ah, Beach Week: a time-honored tradition in which the D.C. suburbs' high school grads flock to Chelsea Beach for seven whole days of debauchery. In this dark comedy, ten teenage girls plan an unhinged blowout the likes of which their young lives have never seen. They smuggle vodka in water bottles and horde prescription drugs by the dozen. Meanwhile, their misguided, affluent parents are too busy worrying about legal liabilities to fret over some missing pills or random hookups.

With the wit of Nora Ephron and the insight of Tom Perrotta, Susan Coll satirizes a teenage rite of passage, in the process dissecting the lives of families in transition.

About the Author

Susan Coll is the author of the novels *Acceptance* (FSG, 2007), *karlmarx.com*, and *Rockville Pike*. A film adaptation of *Acceptance*, starring Joan Cusack, aired on Lifetime Television in 2009. Coll lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband, the writer Steve Coll.

Discussion Questions

1. The Adler family has only recently moved to Verona, Maryland, the fictitious community where the novel is set. In what ways do their relative outsider statuses affect each family member's behavior?
2. Beach Week is intended as a celebration of the achievements of graduating high school seniors, but in this community it has devolved into a week of sanctioned debauchery. The event brings into sharp focus the fault lines in both one family and one community. Why does this event, which is meant to be joyous, become so controversial, and cause each of the adults to become their worst selves?
3. Leah Adler feels as if her family is alone in having to keep an eye on the bank account in this affluent community. How do money concerns affect her actions? Is there a downside to kids growing up amidst such privilege, or is that just something Leah would like to believe?
4. Incorporated into the novel are a number of documents, including passages from a brochure on alcohol poisoning, lists of things to bring to the beach, clauses from a legal contract and pledges the teenagers are meant to sign. What is the purpose of including these? Is this novel a satire? Is there a difference between satire and comedy?
5. Jordan is recovering from a concussion she sustained on the soccer field. In what ways does her recovery influence her behavior and that of her parents? Have you ever set aside your better judgment out of a desire to see your child fit in and be happy?
6. Alice Long, a former television superhero, is now an officious and over-zealous parent who is not afraid to speak her mind. As disagreeable as she is, she is often right. What is her role in the novel? Is there someone in your community who is like this?
7. Is there a senior rite of passage in your community that is as controversial as Beach Week? Should parents allow teens to go off unsupervised to what is openly presumed to be a week-long party? Is there a way to control these events?

8. Noah is the owner of the beach house that the kids wind up renting. What is his role in this novel? Is he seeing something, even through his clouded sense of reality, that the parents fail to perceive?
9. Charles is an urban planner, and the book has several scenes that refer to traffic, sprawl, and community opposition to new development. Does this tie into the novel's larger themes in any way?
10. Susan Coll's previous novel, *Acceptance*, was a satire of college admissions hysteria, set in the same fictitious town as *Beach Week*. Both books draw their humor from closely observing contemporary parenting mores in affluent suburbia. Have parenting mores changed much since your own teenage days? Do kids seem to get into more or less trouble than they did when you were growing up?
11. Jordan spends an inordinate amount of time sending text messages to Khalid. Has social networking and new technology really changed the way kids behave, or do these tools just put a new spin on age-old behavior?
12. One of the themes of the novel has to do with the human need to commemorate. What are the personal and cultural reasons these events sometimes become so excessive—and expensive?
13. The parents in this book are all highly educated, affluent, and even-minded. They are trying to pool their collective wisdom and do the right thing, to no real avail. Does this say more about the kids or the parents?



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