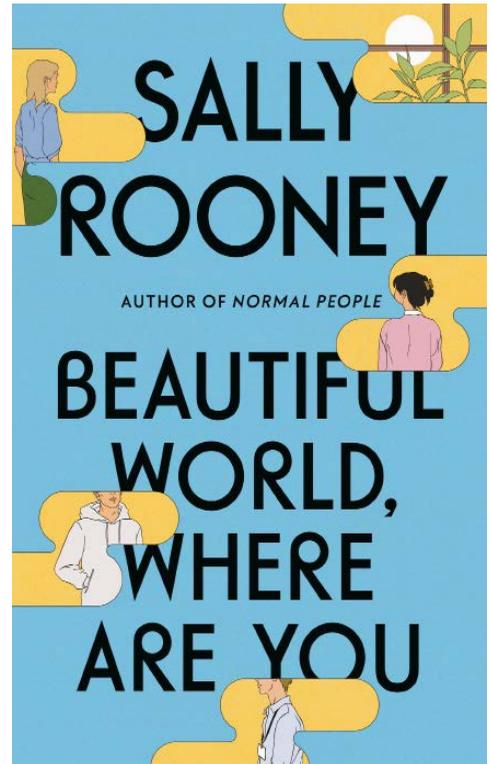


FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

# Reading Group Gold

## *Beautiful World, Where Are You*

by Sally Rooney



ISBN HC: 9780374602604 / 368 pages

*Beautiful World, Where Are You* follows four characters—Alice, a novelist; Eileen, her best friend; Simon, a political consultant; and Felix, a warehouse worker—as they navigate sex, friendship, desire, success, and growing older. When we meet Alice, she’s just moved to a coastal Irish town, while Eileen remains in Dublin—they keep in touch primarily through email. These emails break from the rest of the novel’s form, letting us witness the two women thinking through everything from their closest relationships to broader questions of politics, history, communism, art, plastic, and power. When these four characters finally gather in person, everything buried comes to the surface, and they’re faced with pressing questions about truth, intimacy, and what it means to be alive right now.

This guide is designed to enhance your reading group’s experience of *Beautiful World, Where Are You*. We hope the questions and topics that follow will spark illuminating conversations.

# Reading Group Gold

## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is it like to read a novel about a celebrity novelist who debates the role of novelists and their craft? How would you respond to the question Eileen raises at the beginning of chapter 12: “Do you think the problem of the contemporary novel is simply the problem of contemporary life?” Do you agree with Alice’s definition of a great book (offered in chapter 22) as a work that engages the reader’s sympathies?
2. As you watched Alice and Felix on their first date, what were your initial impressions of them? What did you predict for their relationship?
3. How does technology shape the way the characters communicate with each other? How does Rooney describe technology?
4. How does Alice’s interest in the historical Jesus differ from Simon’s interest in church doctrine? To what extent is religion a cultural anchor for them both? Does Christianity influence their sense of morality?
5. Over the course of the novel, what transformations take place in the way both couples experience sex, eroticism, and love? What enables these two relationships to persist, despite frequent doubts and deep vulnerabilities? How do differences in age and wealth affect their power dynamics?
6. What does the novel help us understand about the nature of friendship? How did you react to the friction between Alice and Eileen that only intensifies when they see each other face-to-face again? What came to mind while you were reading about Eileen’s remorse in chapter 28? Would you have sought a reconciliation?
7. The novel’s point of view shifts from the third person to the first-person email exchanges between Alice and Eileen. How did you understand the third-person narration? What is the effect of these shifting perspectives? Are Eileen and Alice honest with each other, and with themselves?
8. In chapter 27, we learn that Eileen’s take-home pay is less than Felix’s. His job is repetitive and physically dangerous, while Eileen’s work is physically comfortable but precarious in other ways. How do their class backgrounds compare? How does the novel approach labor, wealth, and success?
9. How do Lola and Damian contrast with their siblings? How does our early family life color who we become—and who we are determined not to become?

# Reading Group Gold

10. What do the characters discover about solitude versus companionship? What do humans fundamentally need from each other?
11. How did you feel about the final chapter of the book, which aligns with our own historical moment? Why might Rooney have chosen to conclude in this way?
12. In her acknowledgments, the author describes the multiple origins of the novel's title. What does the beautiful world finally mean to Alice, Felix, Eileen, and Simon? Do they find it? Would the title mean something else if it ended with a question mark?
13. The author's writing style has been praised for delivering direct, precise depictions of complex characters trying to understand each other. How did *Beautiful World, Where Are You* enhance your understanding of other books by Sally Rooney that you have read previously?

*Discussion questions written by Amy Root Clements*