



ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Accelerated
Reader

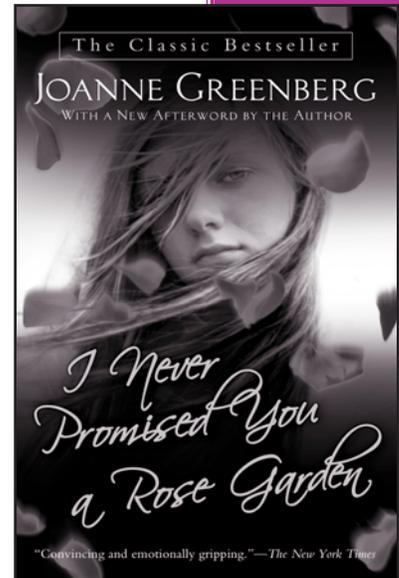
I Never Promised You a Rose Garden

A Novel

By Joanne Greenberg

“A rare and wonderful insight into the
dark kingdom of the mind.”

—*Chicago Tribune*



304 pages

ISBN 978-0-312-94359-2

TO THE TEACHER

Set primarily in an unnamed mental hospital, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* is a compelling novel about a brave, intelligent, and severely troubled young woman in a battle for her very sanity. This is a battle that sixteen-year-old Deborah Blau, who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, must fight with herself—a long and difficult conflict marked by great physical and emotional pain, deep-rooted mental distress, hallucinations, violent episodes, destructive actions, blackouts, self-mutilation, and even suicide attempts. It's a battle stemming from her acute mental illness.

Yet Deborah does not have to confront this battle alone. Witty, perceptive, articulate, appealing—and, of course, terribly unhappy; the words “bitter” and “dark” are often used to describe her—Deborah is also quite fortunate in that the psychiatrist who intends to help her is the famous, brilliant, and truly committed and caring Dr. Clara Fried. With Dr. Fried's aid, Deborah steadily confronts the imaginary Kingdom of Yr, a secret world she invented during a traumatic stay at summer camp, a fantasy-land that appeared to her in the wake of profound sadness and enormous pain. But Yr's various gods and monsters—creatures who govern Deborah's psyche and behavior by “weaving together [her] prologue and destiny;” graceful and attractive beings who were at first Deborah's friends, and later, as she matured, her critics and enemies—are not just confronted, they are mastered. In finally letting go of this vast and complex (and originally comforting) invention of

childhood, in finally surrendering the keys of her imaginary kingdom, Deborah stands poised, at novel's end, to enter not just adulthood and society but the "real world" itself.

And all along, one of the things that makes Deborah so charming as a person, and so likable as a character, is that she knows she would not be making progress without Dr. Fried's assistance. A careful listener and gently encouraging advocate for the ongoing "challenge and choice" both implicit in being sane, Dr. Fried bestows insights, observations, and reflections that serve not as rigid instructions or hollow platitudes to Deborah but as useful guideposts and mirror-like maps. Indeed, the three-year journey that these two women share—a treacherous yet ultimately uplifting and wholly moving experience—is what makes this classic commentary on madness and modern life so special, and so perennially fresh. The thoughts, procedures, and trusting relationships that figure into any voyage of self-recovery—and the great difficulties that some among us will always face in embracing a harsh reality over an idealized dreamworld, such are the themes of this timeless, widely acclaimed novel.

PRAISE FOR
I NEVER PROMISED
YOU A ROSE GARDEN

"Convincing and emotionally gripping . . . A marvelous job . . . With a courage that is sometimes breathtaking . . . [Greenberg] makes a faultless series of discriminations between the justifications for living in an evil and complex reality and the justifications for retreating into the security of madness."—*The New York Times Book Review*

ABOUT
THIS GUIDE

This teacher's guide mainly consists of three sections: Reading and Understanding the Novel, Questions and Exercises for the Class, and Terms to Define and Discuss. The first section—with questions arranged in basically a chapter-by-chapter format—will help students comprehend, and follow along with, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. The second will aid in students' exploration of, and reflection on, this novel—both as individuals and as a group. The third will sharpen students' grasp of this work by way of word definition and concept review. Also, those teachers in search of further social, cultural, historical, or psychological context should note that this novel is actually quite autobiographical. Speeches by, interviews with, and articles about Ms. Green—and about the real-life experiences informing her novel—can be easily found via searching online.

READING AND
FOLLOWING THE
NOVEL

1. What were your initial impressions, of Jacob and Esther Blau? Did your impressions of them change over the course of this book? Explain. Also, what were your initial impressions of the Kingdom of Yr—and did, or didn't, these views likewise change?
2. When thinking about her new patient, sixteen-year-old Deborah Blau, Dr. Clara Fried momentarily catches "in herself the vanity she had once called the doctor's greatest enemy next to his patient's illness" (p. 10). Describe this "vanity." What does she mean? Does such vanity ever appear in this novel?
3. Who is Janus? (Consult a reference work on mythology if you are unsure.) Why does Deborah at certain times adopt the Janus-related Yri term "Januce"? Who is Charon? (This is also a name from classical mythology.) Why does Deborah refer to her nurse by this name on page 19?

4. Describe the Pit, and describe what sorts of notions or experiences take Deborah to this place. What is meant by the statement, “The horror of the Pit lay in the emergence from it” (p. 25)?
5. What did you learn about Deborah’s parents, grandparents, and other relatives over the course of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*? Is Deborah’s sickness as a result—at least in part—of her family’s difficulties, disappointments, and determinations as European Jewish immigrants? Why is Deborah seen by some in her family as “a central pin on which the dream could turn” (p. 31)? And what is this “dream” in the first place?
6. “Something changed,” we read on page 52, “and Yr was transformed from a source of beauty and guardianship to one of fear and pain.” And on the following page: “A sweetness turned into a need, the need into a force, the force into total tyranny.” When and why did Deborah first create Yr—and when and how did this creation so utterly change?
7. “The people on the edge of Hell were most afraid of the devil,” we read on page 70. “For those already in Hell the devil was only another and no one in particular.” How do these remarks reflect life amid the women of the “D” ward? And how, if at all, might they apply to the novel as a whole?
8. Chapter 10 employs the phrase “the boredom of insanity,” calling such boredom “a great desert” (p. 78). How do the various occupants of Ward D cope with this boredom, or don’t they? And how do Carla and Deborah, in particular, bond over such boredom?
9. Who are the “Noses” working in Ward D, and why are they called this?
10. At the end of Chapter 12, Deborah’s arm is burned so severely that smoke rises from the wound and the young woman shakes in pain. What precisely is happening here, and what has caused it? Also, how does Dr. Fried acquire the secret Yri name of “Furii”?
11. After witnessing her ward-mate Helene being beaten by the attendant named Ellis, Deborah confides in Dr. Fried about the incident. When the doctor replies with a somewhat detached I-have-no-say-in-such-matters remark, Deborah asks, rhetorically: “Is Pilate everybody’s last name around here” (p. 107)? What does she mean by this?
12. After a certain meeting with Deborah’s parents, Dr. Fried muses: “Deceits and vanities and arrogances that they would never stoop to for themselves they perpetrate on their children” (p. 112). What behavior on the part of Deborah’s parents has led her to think this? Also, do you think it’s significant—as related to this incident and to her professional treatment of Deborah in general—that Dr. Fried has no children of her own? Explain.
13. Why is Deborah so taken by Miss Coral? What is it about Miss Coral that our protagonist respects? And what gift—or gifts—does Miss Coral bestow upon Deborah?
14. “On a certain night before falling asleep,” we read on page 136, “Deborah had been reborn as a captured Japanese soldier.” Explain this incident. What brought it about? What, finally, ended it? And what role did the Yri creatures play in this so-called rebirth?
15. Who is Doris Rivera? Where did she come from, and why has she returned to “D”? Why does her return draw so much attention in Chapter 17, and why—several chapters later—does Deborah realize that she herself is “a Doris Rivera, a living symbol of hope and failure” (p. 277)?

16. At the outset of Chapter 18, Deborah's parents, Esther and Jacob, attend the grammar-school graduation of Suzy, Deborah's little sister. Later, when Esther tells Suzy, "Debby wanted to come to your graduation," Suzy answers, "She was here" (p. 157). What is she saying here? How does Suzy regard her older sister? And how would you characterize the hold, or even the power, that Deborah's illness has over her family?

17. Who is Dr. Royson? Why is he treating Deborah instead of Dr. Fried? Why, in your view, do Deborah and Dr. Royson have such difficulty connecting?

18. When Chapter 21 begins, the so-called "volcano" that is Deborah has "erupted"—suffering extreme physical pain, mental torment, and emotional terror, she is caught in the merciless grasp of "an Yr gone newly mad" (p. 189). After surviving this waking nightmare, she is visited by Dr. Fried, at which time she tells her doctor, "After you I suffer smarter" (p. 191). What does she mean by this remark? And why do you think (as we discover earlier, in this same scene) that there is no Yri word for "thank you"?

19. Define the "Game" that is mentioned on page 206 and elsewhere in this novel. What are the rules, so to speak, of this contest? Who is playing? Who wins, in the end? And who ultimately loses?

20. Why does Deborah take Carla's hands and briefly hold them at the end of Chapter 23? What makes this act important? What led it to happen? Also, what effect does this act have on Carla—and on Deborah?

21. Paraphrase the dream Deborah has in Chapter 24; explain its imagery and meaning.

22. How would you characterize Deborah's five-day trip home in January—a visit she makes "with eagerness outrunning terror" (p. 225)? Is it productive? Useful? Damaging? Otherwise?

23. Describe the short-lived escape that Deborah and Carla make from the hospital grounds. Why do they choose to flee? Where do they go? How long are they gone? And what reason(s) does each young woman have, finally, for deciding to return?

24. How does Carmen's early exit from the hospital help Deborah come to realize the "freedom" her own parents had given her? And what does Deborah mean by "freedom" here (see p. 238)? What becomes of Carmen after she leaves the hospital, and why?

25. Review the Knowledge / Possible Job list that Deborah creates, at the suggestion of an outpatient administrator, in Chapter 28. Based on how well you, as a reader, "know" Deborah—at this point in the narrative—which of the jobs listed seem like the best-fitting options for her? Which seem the least-fitting?

26. At novel's end, Deborah finally bids farewell to Yr and its inhabitants, saying: "I am going to hang with the world" (p. 278). What does she mean by this—and what do you make of her use of the verb "hang"?

QUESTIONS AND
EXERCISES FOR THE
CLASS

1. Near the beginning of this novel, in Chapter 2, we as readers review Deborah's file as her new doctor does the same. What do we learn about Deborah from this file—not just her age, birthplace, and family history but the possible sources for her physical and emotional pain, and for her serious mental illness?

2. “Causes are too big to see all at once,” Dr. Fried tells Esther Blau on page 28, “or even as they really are, but we can tell our own truths and have our own causes.” Write a short essay detailing whether and how this quotation might be applied to the whole narrative that comprises *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*.

3. As a class, collectively identify—that is, define and trade insights and observations about—the land of Yr and its various beings, such as the Censor, the Collect, Anterrabae, Lactamaeon, Idat, Imorh, etc. When talking about such creatures, try to see them in their entirety—keeping in mind that Yr began in Deborah’s imagination as an attractive kingdom, a personal and utopian fantasy-land; it was not always the private hell it became in later years. Also, name and explain any Yri words that come to mind in your discussion.

4. “Suffer, victim,” “You are not of them,” and “Ngonon cries from itself” are three common Yri phrases that appear throughout the novel; Deborah “hears” these expressions many times in these pages. Explain what each phrase means, stating what it means in Yri (literally) and what it means to Deborah (personally).

5. In Chapter 6, we read of Deborah’s tumor of the urethra, and of the very painful medical treatments she underwent at age five to deal with this problem surgically. In Chapter 8, we read of her horrific exposure—during her third year at summer camp—to vicious and widespread anti-Semitism. Explain how both of these events are not just ongoing facets of Deborah’s sickness but are among the incidents that triggered it.

6. What does the title of this book mean? Also, what do you think of attaching a somewhat sarcastic, almost mocking title like *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* to a grave, far-reaching work about insanity and the modern world? Does such an attachment seem fitting to you? Or else ironic, inappropriate, clever, flippant, or otherwise? Explain.

7. Trust is a major theme in this book. Dr. Fried talks about the difficult and important “work” that they must do together, in order for Deborah to get well. What did this book teach you about the role of trust in the patient-psychiatrist or client-therapist relationship? Also, discuss the different points this novel makes on the subject of what might be called the opposite of trust—that is, lies.

8. Whether its action is unfolding in the B Ward or the D Ward, this novel offers many scenes depicting the frightening characters and frantic situations of a stereotypical “madhouse” narrative. “Here as elsewhere,” we read on page 65, “the attackers were favored above the attacked.” And later on, with the return of Doris Rivera (on page 146), life on the ward seems an almost family-like experience: “A multitude of little sisters was consumed with envy for the attention given to a sibling who had come home.” As a class, or in smaller discussion groups, explore how the mental hospital at the core of this book is presented. Did its appearance throughout the work seem unique, familiar, genuine, contrived, scary, outdated, safe, dangerous, or what?

9. The greatest exponent of comic relief in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* is probably “the unsecret unwife of the abdicated King of England.” Who is this woman, and who exactly does she think she is? Where does she live? How long has she lived there? Point out a few other instances of comic relief in these pages, places in the novel where insanity is successfully played for laughs—as it must be from time to time, in even the most serious accounts. For example, you might consider the young woman who replaces Carla as Deborah’s roommate.

10. From Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde to Lucretius and Virgil, the novel is rich in literary references and classical allusions. Pick out some of these, stating which ones were and were not familiar to you. Then, among the works that were not, select one to read and then report on in a speech before your classmates.

11. The phrase “the little Maybe” keeps popping up in this book. What does it refer to? Write a brief essay explaining both its meaning and its recurrent appearance throughout *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*.

12. In Chapter 23, we find Dr. Fried helping Deborah to realize that she most certainly did not, in fact, try to murder her baby sister. This typically well-considered and considerate eradication of a “truth” that Deborah had “lived with” for years proves, of course, enormously beneficial to our young heroine. Where else in this novel do you observe Deborah, with the aid of Dr. Fried, making such a crucial or otherwise telling breakthrough? Make a list of such breakthrough sessions, and then compare your list with those of your classmates. What patterns or trends, if any, can you see in these sessions?

13. The young woman at the center of this novel was born to a Jewish family, joins a Methodist church choir when she’s finally able to leave her residence at a mental hospital (however temporarily), and later, when asked about her faith, answers: “[I’m] a Newtonian” (p. 231). What message or moral, if any, does this book offer on the subject of Deborah and religion? Might she be going through some sort of spiritual awakening as the novel proceeds, a sort of modern-day/angst-ridden “pilgrim’s progress”? Or is another kind of religious development or quest at hand here? What does Deborah think—and feel, and say—about God?

14. As Deborah becomes more aware of the physical world around her, as her senses and thoughts are increasingly based in reality—that is, as she begins “to be in love with the new world” (p. 212)—our heroine finds much to not merely appreciate but to feast upon or marvel at. Cite a few key passages where Deborah is thrilled about the realm of reality in a particularly memorable or vivid way. How, if at all, do these passages reflect her talents as a visual artist? Also, how might Deborah’s earlier, and frequent, complaints about “gray” or “banded” or “dim” vision reflect these talents?

15. The penultimate sentence of *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* is a quote from a textbook, which reads: “AND BOTH RAILROAD AND THE MORSE TELEGRAPH MAINTAINED CONTACT INDISPENSABLE TO MODERN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY” (p. 279). What metaphoric thrust or symbolic import, if any, do you see in concluding this novel with the idea of “indispensable” contact, connection, and communication?

precocity (p. 2)	sovereignty (p. 146)	antiphon (p. 228)
voracious (p. 6)	phalanx (p. 147)	prodigal (p. 229)
sardonic (p. 7)	virulence (p. 152)	gouache (p. 231)
gauze (p. 13)	abattoir (p. 155)	listless (p. 232)
acerbic (p. 14)	indigenous (p. 158)	cliques (p. 233)
similitude (p. 14)	capitulation (p. 162)	complicity (p. 235)
portcullis (p. 23)	agate (p. 163)	grapevine talk (p. 235)
dybbuk (p. 46)	fait accompli (p. 164)	venerate (p. 236)
solicitude (p. 55)	austerely (p. 167)	bootleg trade (p. 239)
malignant (p. 62)	madonna (p. 171)	improvident (p. 241)
pernicious (p. 62)	Pithecanthropus	worldling (p. 243)
ambiguous (p. 62)	erectus (p. 177)	cantankerous (p. 244)
preternatural (p. 62)	urbane (p. 180)	bogeymen (p. 244)
repudiate (p. 69)	placebo (p. 181)	renunciation (p. 245)
blandishments (p. 80)	unguents (p. 182)	tenuous (p. 247)
carrion (p. 84)	inertia (p. 183)	oscillations (p. 247)
stigmata (p. 87)	aberration (p. 184)	blighting (p. 250)
magi (p. 89)	celluloid (p. 187)	cleaving (p. 251)
tactile (p. 90)	crudity (p. 196)	5 & 10 girl (p. 252)
dynast (p. 97)	nicety (p. 200)	moa (p. 252)
harbinger (p. 98)	infusing (p. 207)	juggernaut (p. 255)
martyrdom (p. 101)	mendicant (p. 207)	incredulously (p. 259)
benthic (p. 103)	ministrations (p. 209)	remonstrate (p. 260)
apocalypse (p. 104)	chastened (p. 209)	fulcrum (p. 265)
ptolemaic (p. 108)	consubstantial (p. 214)	retinue (p. 266)
recalcitrant (p. 113)	gesticulating (p. 215)	gullet (p. 272)
bats-in-the-belfry (p. 116)	make-work (p. 215)	de rigueur (p. 275)
postulants (p. 117)	stigma (p. 216)	allegiance (p. 277)
lascivious (p. 121)	propitiation (p. 217)	antibodies (p. 278)
paroxysm (p. 121)	interloper (p. 220)	
limned (p. 122)	cat's cradle (p. 225)	

ABOUT THE
AUTHORS

Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, an autobiographical novel, was originally published in 1964. The book was later made into a film, and then into a play.

Scott Pitcock, who wrote this teacher's guide, is a freelance writer and editor based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He also works as a public-radio producer, host, and programmer.

FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES AVAILABLE FROM MACMILLAN

Macmillan is pleased to offer educators free Teacher's Guides. If you would like to receive a copy of any of our guides, please email your request to academic@macmillan.com; fax to 646-307-5745; or mail to Macmillan Academic Marketing, 175 Fifth Avenue, 21st floor, New York, NY 10010. Please include the ISBN (listed below) with your request. These guides are also available online, at our website: www.MacmillanAcademic.com.

Allison & Gediman, editors, THIS I BELIEVE	0-8050-8390-1
Ishmael Beah, A LONG WAY GONE	0-374-95085-7
Francis Bok, ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY	0-312-33760-4
Kalisha Buckhanon, UPSTATE	0-312-34448-1
Philip Caputo, A RUMOR OF WAR	0-8050-6791-4
Agatha Christie, AND THEN THERE WERE NONE	0-312-28815-8
Michael Dorris, A YELLOW RAFT IN BLUE WATER	0-312-42271-7
Margaret Edson, WIT	0-374-98704-1
Barbara Ehrenreich, NICKEL AND DIMED	0-8050-8381-2
Robert Fitzgerald, trans., THE ODYSSEY	0-374-96138-7
Robert Fitzgerald, trans., THE ILIAD	0-374-94107-6
Robert Frost, ROBERT FROST'S POEMS	0-312-99131-2
Jostein Gaarder, SOPHIE'S WORLD	0-374-97527-2
Joanne Greenberg, I NEVER PROMISED YOU A ROSE GARDEN	0-312-35844-X
Iris Jacob, MY SISTERS' VOICES	0-8050-7405-8
Jacobson & Colón, THE 9/11 REPORT	0-8090-7200-9
Jamaica Kincaid, ANNIE JOHN	0-374-90230-5
Lawrence & Lee, THE NIGHT THOREAU SPENT IN JAIL	0-8090-7366-8
Gerda Weissmann Klein, ALL BUT MY LIFE	0-374-95781-9
Bernard Malamud, THE NATURAL	0-374-96037-2
Robert J. Mrazek, STONEWALL'S GOLD	0-312-28189-7
Robert Pinsky, trans., THE INFERNO OF DANTE	0-374-94121-1
Rifa'i & Ainbinder, WE JUST WANT TO LIVE HERE	0-312-32292-5
Ntozake Shange, BETSEY BROWN	0-312-28190-0
Dodie Smith, I CAPTURE THE CASTLE	0-312-28813-1
Elie Wiesel, NIGHT	0-8090-7357-9