

Book Group Discussion Guide: JULIANA (1941-1944)

Introduction: Since JULIANA (1941-1944) is filled with history about LGBT life in 1940s New York City I've developed some questions, which may provide a stimulus for discussion for Book Clubs and Classes.

1. What do you think is the purpose of Chapter 1? Did the meaning of this chapter become clearer as you got further into the book? What might it mean in future volumes of this series?
2. Did your expectations of 1940s New York City match what you found in the opening chapters of the novel? Why or Why not? What about your expectations of Greenwich Village at that time? (Introduction, Chapter 2)
3. What are your thoughts about the kids only living an hour away from the city by train and yet they have never been there before? Does this coincide with anything in your own life? (Chapter 2)
4. In the beginning of the book Al often talks about not feeling pretty. She goes so far as to avoid looking at herself in mirrors. On the day of her first "date" with Juliana she wears a suit and tie and her hair has been cut short. She says when she looks in the mirror "...you know what I saw? Me. I really saw me." What is the significance of this for Al? Have you ever had a similar experience? (Chapters 2, 5 & 20)
5. Danny's mother doesn't allow Danny to take dancing lessons with the other children because she thinks dancing turns a boy into a "pansy." This has been a popular American belief for decades. What do you think about this belief now in our modern world? How would you advise a mother if her son wanted to take dancing lessons? Would it matter which type of dancing lessons? For instance, how would you advise the mother if her son wanted to take tap versus ballet lessons? Would an African American parent feel the same or differently to a white parent? What about a Latino parent? An Asian parent? (Chapter 2)
6. What are your thoughts about Danny's and other character's views of the potential war to come in Book I? Did you know that 89% of the American people were against going to war with Germany or Japan right up until the day before Pearl Harbor? Knowing this how might the Japanese's bombing of Pearl Harbor have hit you if you'd heard the same broadcast as they? Can you compare this experience to anything that has happened in your own life? (Chapters 3 & 5)
7. What were your first impressions of Maxwell P. Harlington III? Did his actions in later portions of the novel live up to your first impressions or not? (Chapter 3)

8. Al tells Danny, “What do you know about being a girl? The rules are all different for me. When you’re a girl what you wear is *all* that matters.” What are your thoughts about this? Does this at all apply today? What rules are different today for men than they are for women? (Chapter 4)
9. In what ways were the rules of behavior different for women in 1940s than they are today?
10. Al tells Juliana, that what she really wants to do with her life is “something completely absolutely wonderful. Only—I don’t know what that is.” What is the significance of this to the overall story. How might it affect Al in the future? What do you think she’ll end up doing in future volumes of this series? (Chapter 8)
11. What reaction did you have to the way the kids talk about Roman Catholics? How about later when Al recalls the jokes the neighborhood used to make about Catholics? Al never mentions specifically which religion she and her friends belong to. Do you have any idea why this might be the case? Did you know that there was this much tension between Protestants and Catholics at earlier points of American history? (Chapter 3 & 19)
12. How would you describe Aggie before the war? How, if at all, does she change during the war? What would you predict for her future after the war is over? (C)
13. What was your reaction to Aggie’s explanations of homosexuality? (Chapter 3)
14. Were you surprised by the reactions of Danny’s friends to his homosexuality? Did you know prior to reading this novel that this was a typical reaction? This continued at least into the 1980s, in some areas probably much longer. (Chapter 16)
15. Did this reaction prepare you for Aggie’s reaction when Al confesses to her the feelings she has for Juliana? (Chapter 54)
16. How might Danny’s coming out compare to your own? Think of “coming out” in broad terms, meaning that if you consider yourself gay, straight, queer, transgender or something else you may still may feel a need to “come out.”
17. What are your thoughts about the way Danny handles what he (and the world) considers his “problem.” What was your reaction to his letter? (Chapter 18)
18. What would you predict for Danny’s future once the war is over?
19. How would you describe Dickie? How does his personality change after the war? Do you think he ever returns to dancing or the theater? What would you predict for his future after the war is over?

20. What was your first impression of Virginia? Did this impression change over the course of the novel?
21. Everyone seems to have a different view of Juliana (Al, Max, Virginia, Shirl). Why do you think this is the case? Which of these characters' views do you agree with?
22. What is the significance of Al's recurring "beard" dream?
23. Al says, "Then I kissed her. All on my own..." Later in the same scene she says, "I was doing this; I was making her feel something." What do you think was the significance of these experiences for Al. (Chapter 20)
24. When Juliana asks Al if she has ever masturbated, Al says "No! That's horrible. You're not sposed..." What myths about masturbations might Al have held, which were typical for people living in this time period? (Chapter 20 & 56)
25. Were you surprised to find out that Juliana was married? What were your feelings about this? (Chapter 20)
26. What do you think was the true reason that Max and Juliana stopped speaking to one another?
27. The title of the novel is *Juliana*, and yet Juliana appears in the book much less than other characters like Al, Aggie, Dickie and Max. Why, then, did the author name the book, *Juliana*?
28. What were your first impressions of Juliana? Are these impressions backed up by her later actions?
29. Although Al and Juliana are both white they are not from the same culture. What are their cultural differences and how do these differences impact their relationship in the present? How might these differences impact them in the future?
30. As you read the book how did you feel about the ways the characters referred to certain groups of people such as homosexuals, African Americans, Japanese, disabled?
31. Al's special relationship to sound is mentioned early in the book. Danny calls it her "own special gift" How does the author continue this motif throughout the book? How might "this gift" affect Al in volume 2 of *Juliana (1945-1956)* (Chapter 47)?

32. Al has a mentally disturbed mother who was abusive toward her. How does this upbringing affect Al's perceptions of the world as a young adult? How might the mother's treatment in the hospital have been different from treatments used today? It might be interesting to look up psychological treatments that were used in mental hospitals in the 1920 and 30s.
33. What are your thoughts about Al's father and his way of trying to protect Al from her mother?
34. Throughout the book various "theories" about the cause of homosexuality are presented by different characters. What are your thoughts about these "theories?" How do they compare to today's theories?
35. Were you aware that at one time it was illegal to dress in clothes that were considered appropriate to the opposite sex? What affect might such a law have had on you? Shirl repeatedly breaks this law. How might other gay women who did not dress like this feel about being seen in public with Shirl? What has happened in the past and could happen again in the future to Shirl because she dresses this way?
36. If you did go out in public wearing clothes that were considered appropriate to the opposite gender and a policeman stopped you he could ask you to prove you are wearing three (some authorities say five) items of clothing appropriate to your own gender. If you could not do this he could arrest you. What three to five items might you have produced?
37. When Al tries to tell Juliana about the feelings she has for her Juliana says "those kinds of feelings pass. I don't want to hear about them." Later in the same chapter when Al tries to tell Juliana she's in love with her, Juliana says, "You're not in love with me. I know you think you are, you're not. God created women to fall in love with men so they can get married and have children. What you feel is a perversion. It's not real and I don't want to hear about it." Did this surprise you? Why do you think Juliana says this to Al? (Chapter 50)
38. In what ways does Al change once the war begins? What about when the war is almost over?
39. Were you aware before reading this novel that African Americans and Jews were not permitted to sit in the audience of a nightclub, but they could entertain in one? Café Society (established in 1938) was the first club to allow Jews and African Americans to sit at the tables as customers. What are your thoughts about this? You might want to look up what happened to Barney Josephson, the man who began Café Society, Downtown and Uptown. (Chapter 10)

40. We all have heard about racism in the South, but little is ever stated about racism in the North. What evidence of racism in the New York did you find in the book? Did it surprise you?
41. It might be fun to look up some of the places that are mentioned in the novel that previously existed or still do exist in Manhattan. For those places that do still exist find out how they have changed since the 1940s.
- a. Chumley's
 - b. The Third Avenue El
 - c. Penn Station
 - d. The Whitney Museum
 - e. Cedar Bar
 - f. The Brevoort Hotel
 - g. The Cherry Lane Playhouse
 - h. Reggio's Café
 - i. Bigelow's Apothecaries
 - j. Milligan's Place
 - k. The Women's House of Detention
 - l. MacDougal Street
 - m. Washington Square Park
42. You might want to look up the celebrities mentioned in the book or perhaps see their movies (if they made movies).
- a. Ethel Merman
 - b. Liberace
 - c. Katherine Cornell
 - d. Gertrude Lawrence
 - e. Victor Mature
 - f. Danny Kaye
 - g. Katharine Hepburn
 - h. Angela Lansbury
 - i. Lauren Bacall
 - j. Tallulah Bankhead.
 - k. Selena Royal
 - l. Jane Cowl
 - m. Madame Spivy