



The Girls' Almanac

By Emily Franklin
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Introduction

Set across the Northeast—through suburban neighborhoods, preppy camps, island resorts, and Ivy League colleges—as well as far-flung locales such as Ecuador and Iceland, *The Girls' Almanac* traces the lives and friendships of Jenna and Lucy, who live through a mosaic of wide-ranging experiences, from the politics of high school cliques, the splendor of first love, the pain of infidelity, to the joys of motherhood. Exploring the tender and tenuous connections between women—the fascinating closeness and distance that female friendships encompass—*The Girls' Almanac* reveals the map of Jenna and Lucy's interconnected lives, and ultimately, their pathways to each other.

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the characteristics of Jenna and Lucy that make them suited to become best friends. How are they alike? How are they different?
2. What role does Gabrielle play in *The Girls' Almanac*? How does growing up motherless shape her character? Describe her relationship with her father. Does this relationship help or hinder her ability to form other meaningful relationships? Why can't her father be truthful with his second wife about going on vacation with his daughter?
3. What are your feelings about Kyla in the story "Kindling," in which she is having an affair with Jenna's boyfriend Hull? Kyla does not feel passionate about Hull—why does she sleep with him? What are your feelings about Kyla when she is friends with Lucy? We last see Kyla in the story "Talk." How has she changed? Are you surprised?
4. "Jenna knows that what she loved about Alice—part of the thrill of being with her—was the absolute certainty that she wouldn't last." Describe Jenna and Alice's friendship. What does it tell you about Jenna? Does Jenna's acceptance of Alice's disease surprise you? How does Alice's anorexia-bulimia impact her brother Justin and his relationships with women later?
5. Describe Lucy's relationship with her mother Ginny. Though they are very different, in what ways do they appreciate each other? Several of the characters in *The Girls' Almanac* are motherless—Gabrielle, Justin, Alice. How does that affect the characters' development?
6. How does finding out that Matt was unfaithful to Lucy affect your feelings toward Lucy and their relationship? How does it influence your feelings toward Matt? Does it affect your feelings of compassion for Lucy's loss? If so, how? Justin knew that Matt was unfaithful to Lucy. Was he right not to warn her about Matt before they married? Do you think this is why, when he has to tell Lucy of Matt's death, he says, "You can't marry Matt?"
7. What events cause Jenna to become a cook for the Emotives, a cultlike self-help group? How does the name of this group relate metaphorically to where Jenna is in her life? What happens that makes Jenna know that it is time for her to leave the group?
8. *The Girls' Almanac* chronicles numerous twists and turns in female friendships. How important is friendship to women? Does it vary in importance over the course of women's lives or does its value remain constant?
9. How does knowing about Lucy's loss of Matt affect the tenor of the rest of the stories in *The Girls' Almanac*? Why do you think the author started the book with that story when she could have told the story chronologically?
10. How does the structure of *The Girls' Almanac* affect your feelings about the characters? Would *The Girls' Almanac* have been more effective in another format? Why or why not?

About the Author

Author of *Liner Notes* and the acclaimed *The Principles of Love* series, Emily Franklin's poetry, fiction, and articles have been published widely. She studied at Oxford University, received her B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College, and her M.A. in Writing and Media Studies from Dartmouth College. She is on the staff of National Public Radio's "Car Talk" show and lives near Boston with her husband and three children.