



The Recipe Club

By Andrea Israel
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Introduction

Loyalty, loss, and the ties that bind. These are the ingredients of *The Recipe Club*, a "novel cookbook" that combines an authentic story of friendship with more than 80 delicious recipes.

Lilly and Val are lifelong friends, united as much by their differences as by their similarities. Lilly, dramatic and confident, lives in the shadow of her beautiful, wayward mother and craves the attention of her distant, disapproving father. Val, shy and idealistic and surprisingly ambitious, struggles with her desire to break free from her demanding housebound mother and a father whose dreams never seem to come true.

In childhood, "LillyPad" and "ValPa" form an exclusive two-person club, writing intimate letters in which they share hopes, fears, deepest secrets and recipes, from Lilly's "Lovely Lasagna" to Valerie's "Forgiveness Tapenade." Readers can cook along as the friends travel through time facing the challenges of independence, the joys and heartbreaks of first love, and the emotional complexities of family relationships, identity, mortality, and goals deferred.

The Recipe Club sustains Lilly and Val's bond through the decades, regardless of what different paths they take or what misunderstandings threaten to break them apart . . . until the fateful day when an act of kindness becomes an unforgivable betrayal.

Now, years later, while trying to recapture the trust they've lost, Lilly and Val reunite once more only to uncover a shocking secret. Will it destroy their friendship, or bring them ever closer?

Questions for Discussion

1. Much of *The Recipe Club* is written in a series of letters and emails. Why do you think the authors chose this format to tell their story?
2. Contrast Lilly and Val. What elements made them friends? What did they admire in each other? What didn't they like? How did their perceptions of themselves and each other influence the choices they made? Were you drawn to one woman more than the other?
3. What did *The Recipe Club* mean to Lilly and Val? What might their lives have been like without it?
4. Discuss the girls' parents and their home life growing up. What were the girls' relationships like with their parents? How did the parents' behavior influence their bond?
5. As an adult, Val claims that her friendship with Lilly "has made me who I am." Does friendship truly have the power to shape us and change us? How did their Val and Lilly's friendship make them who they were?
6. How much loyalty do we owe friends? How much do we owe it to ourselves to be true to what we want, even if it causes pain to those we love? How do these questions affect Lilly and Val's relationship?
7. Is it realistic to maintain a life-long friendship? What must friends do to keep a commitment strong as lives change and years pass?
8. Do you think Val betrayed Lilly all those years ago or did she truly have her friend's best interest at heart? Argue the question from both sides.
9. Once they became estranged, why was it so difficult for either Val or Lilly to reach out to the other for reconciliation? When Val finally gets in touch with Lilly, she tells her, "The only way I can make sense of what happened between us is to believe that perhaps we needed that terrible fight." Do you agree with her assessment? Do some relationships need a break to make them stronger?
10. Val admits to Lilly that she was jealous of the way she lived her life. "You always knew exactly what you wanted, and went after whatever it was. You breezed so easily past all cultural norms, as if they simply didn't matter, while all I ever wanted was a feeling of fitting in, of belonging." Do you think Val is accurate in her perceptions? As children, which one do you think was the outsider and which fit in?
11. Along with friendship, food is central to the novel. Many people have emotional bonds with food. How are these bonds fostered and what can they mean for our lives? What role does food play in your life? Do you have any special meals that remind you of particular events in your life? What were some of Val and Lilly's favorites?
12. Val tells Lilly that she has a song she sings for every meal she makes. What songs would you choose for your favorite foods?
13. Were you surprised by Isaac's revelation at the end? How did this news change Lilly and Val's perception of each other and their relationship? How might their relationship have been different if they'd known the truth earlier?

14. Did you try any of the recipes from the book? Do you have a new favorite? Have you ever swapped recipes with a friend? What is the significance of sharing recipes between friends, family, neighbors?

15. What does friendship mean to you? Is there a good friend you have now or someone you've lost touch with that you wish you could connect with again? Share some stories with your group.

About the Author

Andrea Israel has been a television producer and writer for more than 20 years for ABC's *Focus Earth* and *Good Morning America* (which garnered her an Emmy Award), CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360*, and NBC's *Dateline*. Her story, "In Donald's Eyes," was optioned for a film, and she's the author of *Taking Tea*. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Nancy Garfinkel is an award-winning writer, design consultant, creative strategist, and editor. She is coauthor of *The Wine Lover's Guide to the Wine Country: The Best of Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino*. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.