JULIE BUXBAUM

New York Times bestselling author of TELL ME THREE THINGS

Hope ana Othor, Punch Lines

DISCUSSION GUIDE

"A luminous, lovely story about a girl who builds a future from the ashes of her past."

-KATHLEEN GLASGOW, New York Times bestselling author of Girl in Pieces

Hope and Other Punch Lines

ABOUT THE BOOK

Abbi Hope Goldstein is like every other teenager, with a few smallish exceptions: her famous alter ego, Baby Hope, is the subject of internet memes, and sometimes people spontaneously burst into tears when they recognize her. Abbi has lived almost her entire life in the shadow of the terrorist attacks of September 11. On that fateful day, she was captured in what became an iconic photograph: in the picture, Abbi (aka Baby Hope) wears a birthday crown and grasps a red balloon; just behind her, the South Tower of the World Trade Center is collapsing.

Now, fifteen years later, Abbi is desperate for anonymity and decides to spend the summer before her seventeenth birthday incognito as a counselor at Knight's Day Camp two towns away. She's psyched for eight weeks in the company of four-year-olds, none of whom have ever heard of Baby Hope.



Grades 9 & Up • HC: 978-1-5247-6677-1 GLB: 978-1-5247-6678-8 • EL: 978-1-5247-6679-5

Too bad Noah Stern, whose own world was irrevocably shattered on that terrible day, has a similar summer plan. Noah believes his meeting Baby Hope is fate. Abbi is sure it's a disaster. Soon, though, the two team up to ask difficult questions about the history behind the Baby Hope photo. But is either of them ready to hear the answers?

Pre-Reading Activities

Consider the following questions before reading the book. When you've finished the book, revisit your answers and see if your thoughts or assumptions have changed in light of what you've read.

HISTORY: The terrorist attacks that took place on 9/11/01 have affected all manner of social norms, from security measures to design of public spaces to racial profiling. An entire generation was directly and indirectly changed by the events.

- 1. What do you know about the 9/11 attacks?
- 2. Do you know of anyone who experienced or was affected by the events of 9/11?
- 3. Do you notice any impact of the attacks on your own community?
- 4. Do you think the events of 9/11 changed race relations in America?

Classroom Discussion

FINDING ANSWERS: As human beings, we like to have answers, even if they might not be what we want to hear. As Noah interviews the survivors from the Baby Hope photo, he witnesses a variety of responses to his questions about what happened that day. Some of the answers he receives are helpful, but others are not. Use the following questions to consider your own motivations for seeking answers, and how persistent you might get when answers are hard to find.

- 1. Have you ever fixated on a question so much that it started to feel like an obsession? What was the experience like? Did you find the answer in the end?
- 2. Have you ever pushed someone for answers even though it was obvious that they did not want to discuss the situation? Did you consider how your questions might impact the other person?
- 3. If you had the opportunity to interview a survivor of the 9/11 attacks, what questions would you want to ask? How would you ensure that you were being sensitive to their experiences while also gaining knowledge?

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA: In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, many people became more fearful of others, especially people from the Middle East and South Asia. In the novel, one of the interviewees (Raj) tells Noah, "I was born and raised in New York. After that day, for the first time in my life, I didn't feel safe walking around in my own city because of my turban" (p. 178).

- 1. Define xenophobia. What is the difference between xenophobia and racism?
- 2. Have you witnessed or experienced instances of racism or xenophobia in your community or school? Have you thought about why people became afraid of others?
- 3. What is your initial response to seeing someone targeted by racism or xenophobia?
- 4. How do you see xenophobia and racism being reinforced in the media or within your own community?
- 5. In what ways can you and your friends help make a safer community for people targeted by racism and xenophobia?

FAME: "To meet Abbi Hope Goldstein is to meet Baby Hope, and to understand that in my town, at least, I get pointed at—people know my name even though we've never met—and occasionally, someone will corner me in a supermarket line while my hands are full of deodorant and hummus and tell me where they were that morning" (p. 12).

- 1. What connection do people feel that causes them to act like this around Abbi?
- 2. How do you think social media has influenced the ideas of celebrity or fame? If someone or something is famous on social media, does that make them famous in all of society? Why or why not?
- 3. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt the need or desire to try to connect with someone in the public spotlight? Why did you feel that need?
- 4. How does the mainstream media and/or social media affect how connected you feel to people you have never met? How does this affect society at large?

GUILT: Abbi is conflicted throughout the novel, teetering between being grateful that she is alive and feeling guilty about being unable to live up to people's expectations. Look at the following statement and consider how you might feel if you were the lone survivor of a major tragedy: "Cat and I rarely talked about the Baby Hope thing . . . because until recently, it was our only disconnect. Her dad *died* on 9/11. My whole family, me included, lived. In some ways, you might even argue we profited from it" (pp. 87–88).

- 1. Why does Abbi feel guilty for surviving?
- 2. What outside forces do you think contribute to and exacerbate survivor's guilt?
- 3. What does Chuck mean when he says, "You're the symbol. We're just background players" (p. 102)?

DEATH: "When I die, will people pull down their posters of me? Will they feel betrayed? Like I didn't deliver on what Baby Hope promised all those years ago?" (p. 63)

Consider the following questions and discuss why Abbi feels like she owes so much to society even though she had no choice in being in the photo in the first place.

- 1. Why does Abbi feel she would be betraying people for dying?
- 2. What does she mean when she notes that by dying, she would be failing to "deliver on what Baby Hope promised"? Why does she feel responsibility to others?

LOSS AND FEAR: The aftermath of 9/11 was unlike that of any other terrorist attack; one haunting aspect of it was the sheer number of funerals that were held and the fact that so many were held with empty caskets. Abbi notes, "In 2001, my parents went to fifty-three funerals in one month. They bought condolence cards in bulk from Costco" (p. 11). In addition, Noah's search for his father is based entirely on the fact that his father's body was never found.

- 1. In what ways do you think this type of situation has affected people's outlook on life?
- 2. How did this exposure to death on a large scale affect Abbi's parents and their relationship?
- 3. Why isn't Abbi willing to tell her parents about developing 9/11 syndrome? What does she fear from its development, besides death?

SOCIAL MEDIA: "As I scroll, I tell myself to stay away from this stuff. My Saturday-morning online ritual of vicarious socializing has turned masochistic, not at all in keeping with my mission this summer. Seeing other people's manufactured joy in glossy Technicolor, as addictive as that may be, tends to leave me feeling deflated" (p. 86). Social media sites—Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.—have become a normal part of our lives over the last decade. Considering the following questions, discuss how much of your life revolves around these platforms.

- 1. How does it make you feel to see good or bad things happening to other people on social media? Do you find yourself obsessing over other people's lives or accomplishments because of social media?
- 2. Think about how Abbi feels seeing Cat partying with other people on social media. How does this affect her? Have you ever had a fear of missing out?
- 3. Do you believe that you have the right to be forgotten after you've posted pictures or details about your life online? Do you think about the long-term consequences of what you post on social media?

FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE: Family dynamics and friendship are core components of the novel. Abbi's parents are reevaluating their relationship. Noah is helping his friend Jack find a boyfriend while also trying to develop a connection with Abbi. And Abbi is coming to terms with having grown apart from her friend Cat. Consider the following questions and discuss them in relation to your experiences.

- 1. What happened between Cat and Abbi to cause them to part ways?
- 2. How does Cat's new lifestyle cause Abbi to reevaluate her connections with Cat and others in her life?
- 3. How does Jack's trouble with romantic relationships help Noah and Abbi understand their own connection and possible romantic interest?

HUMOR: Throughout the novel, Noah is trying to find some closure or solace through the creation of the best 9/11 joke in the world. While it may at first seem shocking to make a joke out of a mass tragedy, people often use humor as a way of dealing with difficult moments in life. When the pregnant woman tells Noah what his father said as he rescued her from the collapsing building, she notes, "I know it sounds inappropriate, but I swear it was the perfect thing. I was terrified and his silly joke brought me back to myself. He made me feel better. He reminded me that I was *alive*" (p. 294).

- Have you ever used humor as a way of coping with difficult times in your life? How did people react?
- 2. How does humor help to ground us in difficult situations or when we simply cannot cope with certain life events?
- 3. Why does the book's title reference humor even though the story is focused on heavy topics like terrorism, death, loss, and guilt?

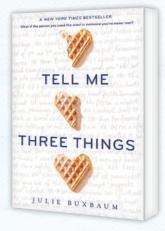
BEFORE AND AFTER: A common theme through Abbi's life is the idea of before and after: her life before and after 9/11; her life before and after she and Cat grow apart; her life before and after her parents are divorced. Consider the following questions as you reflect on your own life.

- 1. How does "before and after" change the ways the survivors approach their own lives?
- 2. What would you define as a life-changing moment? Is it something that happens to you as a result of changes in family or in your community? Have your ever experienced something that has changed you as a person?
- 3. Consider the ways people in your own life who have changed because of something they experienced. Why do major events in life affect people so differently?

HEROISM: Being a hero is complicated. There is often a huge burden associated with heroism. Noah's father is considered by many, including Noah's mother, to be a hero. Noah, however, does not see it that way, at least not at first.

- How does it affect us when people we know are considered to be heroic? Consider how Noah is affected by people calling his father a hero: "My dad was a hero, and what do I do when faced with my first real life-and-death situation? I panic" (p. 235).
- 2. Must a hero be perfect? Why are people surprised when heroes turn out to be flawed?
- 3. Have you ever considered someone to be a hero but changed your opinion as you got to know more about them?

MORE FROM JULIE BUXBAUM



TR: 978-0-553-53567-9



TR: 978-0-553-53571-6

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



IULIE BUXBAUM is the author of YA novel What to Say Next, as well as the New York Times bestseller Tell Me Three Things, her debut young adult novel. She also wrote the critically acclaimed The Opposite of Love and After You. Her work has been translated into twenty-five languages. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their two young children.

juliebuxbaum.com 🄰 @juliebux



Visit RHTeachersLibrarians.com, your online destination for all the resources you need for your school or library!

@RHCBEducators RHCB





This guide was written by Dr. Robert Bittner, YA Literature Specialist, University of British Columbia. Follow him on twitter at @r_bittner.

School & Library Marketing • Random House Children's Books • 1745 Broadway • New York, NY 10019