

READING GROUP GUIDE

Lunch in Paris

A Love Story, with Recipes

By Elizabeth Bard

Questions and topics for discussion

1. In *Lunch in Paris*, major life events are landmarked by food. Why is food such a potent force — and is this particularly true in France? Has a meal ever changed your life? Do you have a particular food that brings to mind certain memories, certain people?
2. Elizabeth is slow to assimilate into French culture, in spite of her eagerness to do so. Which parts of this adaptation do you think would be the most difficult?
3. Elizabeth faces some linguistic challenges as well as cultural ones, especially when she meets Gwendal's parents — and then introduces them to her own. How does she overcome communication barriers?
4. Halfway through a first date with her future husband, Gwendal, Elizabeth goes home with him. How key a role does food play in the seduction that follows? How does sex on a first date play differently between France and America? Does the author seem confused or liberated — or both — by the cultural differences?
5. Elizabeth has some difficulty adjusting to life in Paris after having grown up in New York. What are the main differences she sees between French and American culture?
6. In the beginning, Elizabeth has trouble understanding Gwendal's lack of a concrete "five-year plan." Throughout the book, how do their different visions of success clash and, ultimately, complement each other?
7. In explaining his frustrations with the French system, Gwendal quotes the American author (and former Paris resident) Henry Miller: "In America, every man is potentially president. Here, every man is potentially a zero." What do you make of Gwendal's statement?

8. Elizabeth pushes Gwendal to pursue his career beyond what is generally socially acceptable. What do you make of her effort — and his eventual success?

9. Despite some misgivings, Elizabeth is helpless but to fall in love with French cooking. What would you say typifies Parisian cuisine? If you had to serve a typically “American” meal to a French person, what would it be like? What do you think our way of eating says about American culture?

10. What meal or dish could you be seduced by — or which would you use to seduce someone?

11. When Elizabeth asks for a “normal”-size piece of cake at a family dinner, she makes a subtle cultural error that takes her a long time to understand. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt you missed a social cue but didn’t quite understand what you did wrong?

12. Elizabeth voices serious doubts about raising a child under the French system of health care, after seeing how doctors treated Gwendal’s father. Is her wariness justified? Would you be able to reconcile the French outlook with your own?

13. What will be the ongoing challenges — and opportunities — as Elizabeth and Gwendal continue to shape their life and grow their family in Paris?

Elizabeth Bard's Suggestions for a Well-Stocked Bookshelf

Even before I discovered the joys of the kitchen, books nourished my soul. Taste in books is as individual as taste in food. Some like a creamy chocolate creation, lush and overflowing; some like the snap of a crisp green bean. Here are a few of my favorites.

Two cookbooks I read in bed:

The Joy of Cooking by Irma S. Rombauer, Marion Rombauer Becker, and Ethan Becker

Cooking for Mr. Latte by Amanda Hesser

Two books that made me snort coffee through my nose:

Me Talk Pretty One Day by David Sedaris

Bridget Jones's Diary by Helen Fielding

A book so pitch-perfect it made we weep:

Home by Marilynne Robinson

Two books that made me say, "Dear God, I wish I'd written that":

Fugitive Pieces by Anne Michaels

For Kings and Planets by Ethan Canin

Three books I wish I'd never read so I could read them again for the first time:

East of Eden by John Steinbeck

Possession by A. S. Byatt

The Known World by Edward P. Jones

Four books I stayed up all night reading:

The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay by Michael Chabon

War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy

The only book I ever left on a train (on purpose):

Enduring Love by Ian McEwan

The one book I wish I had the time to memorize, unabridged:

Paradise Lost by John Milton

Two memoirs that made me want to have lunch with the author:

Eat, Pray, Love by Elizabeth Gilbert

When a Crocodile Eats the Sun: A Memoir of Africa by Peter Godwin

Two Books I can't wait to share with my son:

Dr. Seuss's Sleep Book by Dr. Seuss

Great Expectations by Charles Dickens