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## BOOK CLUB KIT

### What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank

*Nathan Englander*

#### Author Biography

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Nathan Englander was born in New York in 1970 to a Orthodox Jewish family and attended yeshiva. He lived in Israel in the mid-90s and attended the Iowa's Writer Workshop. In 1999, at the age of twenty-nine, he published his first collection of stories, *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*. He won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a PEN/Malamud Award, the Bard Fiction Prize, the Sue Kaufman Prize from the American Academy of Arts & Letters and was a finalist for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize. He lives in Brooklyn.

#### Other Works by Nathan Englander

*Dinner at the Center of the Earth* (2017) a novel about the Israel-Palestine conflict, hinging on the relationship between a secret prisoner and the guard who watched him for a dozen years.

*The Twenty-Seventh Man* (2014) a play based on Englander's story of the same name, inspired by the historical event in which Jewish intellectuals were rounded up and murdered per Stalin's orders.

*What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* (2012) a collection of eight stories exploring themes of neighborliness and trust.

*New American Haggadah* (2012) a new translation of the story of Exodus, edited by Jonathan Safer Foer, illustrated by Oded Ezer with commentary by Jeffrey Goldberg, Lemony Snicket, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, and Nathaniel Deutsch.

*The Ministry of Special Cases* (2007) a novel set during Argentina's Dirty War of the 1970s in which a husband and wife must search the Ministry for the truth behind their son's disappearance.

*For the Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999) a collection of ten stories rooted in Orthodox Jewish customs exploring with humor and compassion human crisis.

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## Facts & Trivia

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- JMRL's inaugural *Same Page* author
- SUNY Binghamton alumnus
- Worked in a commercial photography studio after college
- Teaches twice a year in Paris
- Wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* entitled "What Jewish Children Learned from Charlottesville" on August, 2017([nyti.ms/2vZyxGL](https://nyti.ms/2vZyxGL))

## Questions for Discussion

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These questions focus on the title story specifically and the collection as a whole. Adapted from the Random House readers' guide: [bit.ly/2DdsqzU](https://bit.ly/2DdsqzU)

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not? Which was your favorite story?
2. The title of the first story is inspired by the Raymond Carver short story "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love," which also features two couples sharing a drink and secrets. Did knowing (or not knowing) this affect your reading of it?
3. "And Deb has what can only be called an unhealthy obsession with the idea of that generation being gone. Don't get me wrong. It's important to me, too. I care, too. All I'm saying is, there's healthy and unhealthy, and my wife, she gives this subject a lot, *a lot*, of time." What does it mean to have an unhealthy obsession with the Holocaust?
4. Discuss the game "the Righteous Gentile," What do they learn about each other and themselves? Does this change the mental image you drew of them at the start of the story?

(over)

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5. What do these stories tell us about who owns history and specifically who can talk about being Jewish?
6. According to the stories, what is the place of religion in modern life? What do you think the author makes of faith?
7. Many of the stories tackle serious issues with humor. How does the author use this change in tone to make his points?
8. Stories, retold over thousands of years, define history. What is the author telling us about the role of storytelling in memory?
9. Given the events of 2017 in Charlottesville, what do these stories tell us about community-building, trust and fear?