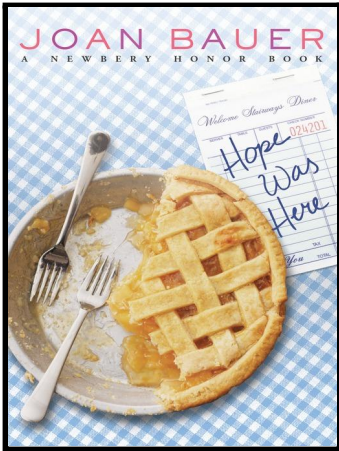




Hope Was Here Reader's Guide

BOOK BUZZ



Hope Was Here

By Joan Bauer

Puffin Books

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A Penguin Random House Reading Group Guide

Questions and Topics for Discussion

Introduction

When sixteen-year-old Hope and the aunt who has raised her move from Brooklyn to Mulhoney, Wisconsin, to work as waitress and cook in the Welcome Stairways diner, they become involved with the diner owner's political campaign to oust the town's corrupt mayor.

About Joan Bauer

Joan Bauer was born in River Forest, Illinois, the eldest of three sisters. Her mother was a schoolteacher with a great comic sense; her father, a salesman that no one could say no to. Her maternal grandmother had been a famous storyteller and had a striking effect on Bauer's early years. "She would tell me stories with five different voices and as many dialects. I would sit on her enormous lap transfixed at how she could teach me about life and make me laugh through her stories. She taught me the significance of humor and how it intersects our daily lives."

Bauer managed an eclectic list of jobs from assistant typing teacher at age twelve to high school waitress. In her early twenties, she was a successful advertising and marketing salesperson. Professional writing for magazines and newspapers followed, then



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screenwriting, which was cut short by a serious car accident. She regrouped and wrote *Squashed*, which won the Delacorte Prize for a First Young Adult Novel. Five novels for young adult readers have followed: *Thwonk*, *Sticks*, *Rules of the Road*, *Backwater* and *Hope was Here* (Newbery Honor Medal).

Joan lives in Darien, CT with her husband and daughter.

An Interview with Joan Bauer

Q. Why is humor so vital to your writing?

Because humor is so vital in my life. When I utilize humor in my writing, I'm connecting to a deep place in myself that says, "no matter how bad things get, there is hope." I believe that with all of my heart. That's what I love about humor—at least the kind that makes us look at life's difficulties differently—laughing in the midst of pain says to me that we are already on the road moving away from it. We're going to make it. I'd like to think that readers connect to that sentiment, too. We need to laugh for so many reasons. It brings perspective; it brings healing; it builds relationships; it brings release. People have asked me if I would ever write a "totally serious book." I have to say that I do write totally serious books that use laughter against the storm of life.

Q. Your novels do deal with serious subjects. How hard is it to walk the fine line between laughter and tragedy?

It's brutal sometimes. I agonize over words, motives. I do not want anyone to think I am making fun of alcoholism, Alzheimer's disease, death, divorce, being overweight. But here's the thing: my first drafts are rarely funny and I am grimly sober while writing them. But I am getting down to the serious underpinnings of the story. Then I do look and see where the funny voice can break through. I see where comic relief can cushion a hard scene. I ask myself constantly, where can the humor break forth here and make a point?

Q. How are you like Hope?

I'm hopeful like she is, and I've had to fight to stay that way. It isn't my natural state. I work at hopefulness. I don't expect life to be easy. Like her, I am an over-comer. I had a deep need as a teen to have a healthy father—mine was an alcoholic. I was a waitress as a teen and a good one. I love food; it is a passion for me. I have also had to work on my anger over the years. Hope and I are very alike.



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But here is where we are different. I never moved from place to place. I lived with my mom, grandmother, and two sisters in the same house. Hope has a good sense of herself, what she is good at and what she's not. I didn't have that much when I was a teenager.

She is more patient than I and better able to absorb the quirkiness of people around her. One of the things I like about her is the fact she has great faith that her father is going to find her and she keeps these scrapbooks for him so that when he finally shows up she'll be ready to tell him about her life. I would have never done that.

Q. What is a typical day at the “office” like for you?

I try to clear my mind for the work ahead. I try to remember what Ernest Hemingway said about writing: Stop for the day when you've written something you feel good about. That makes it easier to get back to it the next morning. I don't wait for inspiration; I just go to work. More and more I read things out loud to check for authenticity of voice. I did that a great deal for *Hope was Here*. One of the big words in my life is “revision.” It's kind of like labor and delivery. The baby is coming out and you don't have a lot to say about it.

Discussion Questions

1. Titles always hold special significance to the story. For example, how does the title *Hope Was Here* focus your attention as a reader? Other than the literal reference, what else does the title suggest about the book? Does it tell you the truth? What about the titles of *Backwater* and *Rules of the Road*? How does each indicate the literal and symbolic natures of the stories?

2. Hope's name is pivotal to the development of her character and to the development of the story. How do the various definitions of the word “hope” add to the story? See, for example, the reference made on page 22 (page number may vary by version).

3. There are other important symbols in this story. What roles do each of the following play in terms of developing character, advancing the plot, or serving as foreshadowing? Are there other symbols essential to the story? If so, what are they?

- Day lily (page 85 - page number may vary by version)
- Welcome stairways (page 14 - page number may vary by version)



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4. In each of Bauer's works, it is important to the main character that she provide some sense of comfort to the people she encounters. For Jenna in *Rules of the Road*, comfort comes in the form of the perfect show for each customer. How does Hope provide that measure of comfort? What does this tell you about her character? How about Ivy Breedlove in *Backwater*?
5. Fathers are a central concern to the characters in *Hope Was Here*, *Backwater*, and *Rules of the Road*. Discuss the similarities and differences among the fathers of Hope, Ivy, and Jenna.
6. Ultimately, all characters leave their mark on us as readers. How does Hope leave her mark literally and figuratively? How do Ivy and Jenna leave their marks?
7. Why is humor such an essential ingredient in each of Joan Bauer's books? How would the stories change if they were somehow more "serious" in tone? How would your response to the story be affected?
8. Occasionally, we are swayed to purchase a book because the title is intriguing, Bauer used the title *Welcome Stairways* as she wrote *Hope Was Here*. The title changed after the story was completed. What reaction do you have to the working title? Might the working title affect your reaction to the book? What alternative titles might you suggest for *Rules of the Road* and *Backwater*?



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