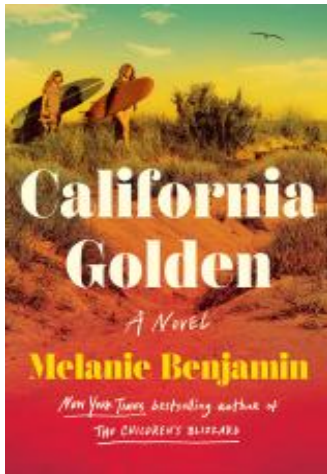


# California Golden

by Melanie Benjamin

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## About the Book

**Two sisters navigate the thrilling, euphoric early days of California surf culture in this dazzling saga of ambition, sacrifice, and the tangled ties between mothers and daughters from the *New York Times* bestselling author of *THE AVIATOR'S WIFE*.**

Southern California, '60s: endless sunny days surfing in Malibu, followed by glittering neon nights at Whisky a Go Go. In an era when women are expected to be housewives, Carol Donnelly breaks the mold as a legendary female surfer struggling to compete in a male-dominated sport --- and her daughters, Mindy and Ginger, bear the weight of Carol's unconventional lifestyle.

The Donnelly sisters grow up enduring their mother's absence --- physically, when she's at the beach, and emotionally, the rare times she's at home. To escape questions about Carol's whereabouts --- and to chase her elusive affection --- they cut school to spend their days in the surf. From her first time on a board, Mindy is a natural, but Ginger, two years younger, feels out of place in the water.

As they grow up and their lives diverge, Mindy and Ginger's relationship ebbs and flows. Mindy finds herself swept up in celebrity, complete with beachside love affairs, parties at the Playboy Club, and a USO tour in Vietnam. Meanwhile, Ginger, desperate for a community of her own, is tugged into the dangerous counterculture of drugs and cults. But through it all, their sense of duty to each other survives, as the girls are forever connected by the emotional damage they carry from their unorthodox childhood.

A gripping, emotional story set at a time when mothers were expected to be Donna Reed, not Gidget, *CALIFORNIA GOLDEN* is an unforgettable novel about three women living in a society that was shifting as tempestuously as the breaking waves.

## Discussion Guide

**Please note: There are spoilers ahead.**

1. CALIFORNIA GOLDEN explores a number of themes, including family, loyalty, ambition and reconciling societal norms with individual desires. Which theme resonates the most deeply with you, and why?
2. Mindy and Ginger's parents never treated them well as kids and always involved them in their arguments. In what ways do you think this shaped Mindy and Ginger as individuals? How do you see this impact them throughout the rest of the story?
3. Despite a caring husband and loving daughters, Carol resented --- and resisted --- the traditional life in front of her. Why do you think that is? What could she have done differently? What would you have done if you were in her shoes?
4. Mindy and Ginger grow apart and live completely different lives. Why do you think they didn't stay in contact with one another? How do you think their lives might have been different if they hadn't fallen out of touch?
5. Ginger goes through so much pain in her life with no real support. Why do you think she was so attached to Tom, even though he treated her so badly?
6. What does this novel tell you about love and friendship from family?
7. Do you think surfing serves as a metaphor in CALIFORNIA GOLDEN? What do you think it means?
8. If you were in Mindy's shoes and found out your sister had had a baby with your significant other, would your reaction have been the same as Mindy's? Do you think Mindy made the right choice raising the baby with Jimmy?
9. The Donnelly girls were a big thing in the surfing community (the "Fabulous Donnelly Girls!"), but they never seem to think of themselves as so. Why do you think that is?
10. Melanie Benjamin is known for grounding her novels in historically rich settings, and CALIFORNIA GOLDEN is set in the '60s, a time of significant cultural shifts and events. In what ways do we see the positive cultural changes at play, and what ways do we see the negative?
11. How do you feel about how the story ended? Do you feel the author was trying to leave you with any specific message?

## Author Bio

Melanie Benjamin is the *New York Times* bestselling author of CALIFORNIA GOLDEN, THE CHILDREN'S BLIZZARD, MISTRESS OF THE RITZ, THE GIRLS IN THE PICTURE, THE SWANS OF FIFTH AVENUE, THE AVIATOR'S WIFE, THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MRS. TOM THUMB and ALICE I HAVE BEEN. Benjamin lives

in Chicago, where she is at work on her next historical novel.

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