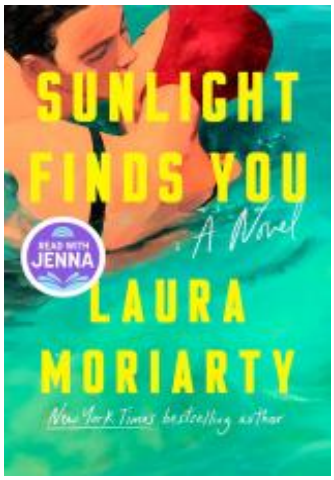
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Sunlight Finds You

by Laura Moriarty



About the Book

A forbidden love blows open the world of a teenage girl, altering the trajectory of her life --- from the author of the *New York Times* bestseller THE CHAPERONE.

It?s 1949, early in the Cold War, but St. Petersburg, Florida is warm, lush, and booming with newcomers seeking sunshine and opportunity. For 17-year-old Nora, St. Pete feels like paradise, especially after she meets and wins over Leonard, the shy, brilliant son of transplanted New Yorkers. Nora and Leonard are soon spending balmy days and evenings together, and in her adoring, encouraging company, he grows more confident, even as he remains tender and caring. Leonard's sophisticated mother welcomes Nora into their lives, but his father distrusts her motives.

When his suspicions are seemingly confirmed, Nora is forced to cut contact. In her longing and fear, she takes a chance that changes her life, exiling her from the family she loves and setting off a chain of secrets and betrayals that will follow her into adulthood. It is a mature Nora who tells the story of her turbulent past. Wiser and more worldly, she commits to an honest but compassionate account, and to a future based on trusting, first and foremost, herself.

SUNLIGHT FINDS YOU is, ultimately, a love story set in the past that has much to say about our present. Richly layered and propulsive, it?s a book about extending forgiveness --- for ourselves and for others --- and about refusing to settle for a life that is less than full.

Discussion Guide

1. SUNLIGHT FINDS YOU tells the story of Nora Chesnow and Leonard Lifton, two teenagers from 1950s Florida who fall in love even as various forces conspire to keep them apart. Are Leonard and Nora passive victims of fate, or is there anything they could have done to change their circumstances? In what ways are they active agents over their own futures? What larger questions relating to accountability, consequences and social mores were raised for you as you read?

2. The novel is about a complicated romantic relationship between two young people, but it is also the story of two families, and the way that they negotiate their expectations and obligations to one another. How do the Chesnows and the Liftons grapple with each other? Despite their differing circumstances, do you think each family wields power? If yes, how so?

3. Nora and Leonard?s story unfolds against the backdrop of the Korean War, as well as changing attitudes in the United States toward race and gender. In what ways do the characters push against social norms, and in what ways do they reflect them?

4. Describe Nora?s character and the shifts she undergoes over the course of the eventful years during which the book is set. Why do you think Laura Moriarty chose to have an older Nora narrate the story, looking back on the events of her youth? What do we gain from this vantage?

5. Laura Moriarty paints a vivid portrait of both Florida and New Jersey in the 1950s. How are these regions characterized? How do regional attitudes toward single women manifest differently in these settings? Is the tone of the social workers similar to or different from that of Nora and Leonard?s families?

6. Describe the role of class in the novel. Do you think that questions of class influenced the response of Leonard?s parents to Nora?s predicament? Would they have behaved similarly if Nora were the daughter of a wealthy family? What socioeconomic class is Russ from, and how does that become an important factor in the story?

7. Leonard?s mother, Geneva Lifton, is a sophisticated and well-read woman, despite being primarily a homemaker. How might her love of reading have served as a way for her to connect with Nora? Was this a missed opportunity? What does it say about the role of literature in fostering (or failing to foster) ethical concern?

8. What role does Carol play in Nora?s own thinking about her life?s possibilities? Does Nora respect Carol? Pity her? Admire her? How do Nora?s conflicting emotions affect her ability to maintain a relationship with Carol once they each have made their crucial decisions?

9. When she?s a child, Nora?s mother sings her to sleep with the words ?Sweet dreams til sunbeams find you.? The title of the book seems to be referencing this song. Traditionally, sunlight is often used as a symbol of truth and enlightenment. How do the themes of truth and lies figure throughout the story? In a world where not all is as it appears, what significance might Carol?s blindness have as a literary symbol?

10. The novel begins with Nora describing a central loss: the death of her mother. How does this death act as a motor for the book, in terms of both its plot and its underlying themes? Does this cast light --- no pun intended --- on Leonard?s significance to Nora? Or on the relationship between Nora and Mrs. Lifton?

11. Russ admires Nora even though he?s aware of her history. What do Nora and Russ provide for each other? What do

you think the central conflict of their partnership is, and how do each of them express it? How does Russ? character and his ambitions reflect the development of Florida at the time?

12. The different experiences of Leonard and Nora represent the stark contrast with which men and women were treated in the 1950s. How does Laura Moriarty underscore this social and political theme? How might this historical climate affect the relationships among the female characters in the book: Nora, Mae, Mrs. Lifton, Miss Berry and Carol? Compare and contrast the models of womanhood that each character represents. How do gender and class intersect in the way these relationships unfold?

13. What does the ending of the novel suggest about what it takes to achieve reconciliation, even in the face of major disappointments, or betrayal, from those closest to us?

Author Bio

Laura Moriarty is the author of the national bestseller THE CHAPERONE, as well as THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING, THE REST OF HER LIFE, WHILE I'M FALLING and SUNLIGHT FINDS YOU. She received her master?s degree from the University of Kansas and was awarded the George Bennett Fellowship for creative writing at Phillips Exeter Academy. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas.

Sunlight Finds You

by Laura Moriarty

Publication Date: August 4, 2026
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction, Women's Fiction
Hardcover: 464 pages
Publisher: Riverhead Books
ISBN-10: 1594487170
ISBN-13: 9781594487170