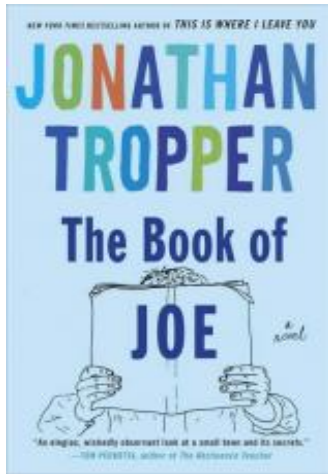


# The Book of Joe

by Jonathan Tropper

---



## About the Book

By turns wickedly funny and achingly poignant, **The Book of Joe** proves that you can go home again . . . even if you have to battle the bullies of your youth.

Joe Goffman escaped oppressive Bush Falls, Connecticut, as soon as he could. But he could never get his hometown out of his mind, inspiring him to write a novel savaging everything and everyone there. When the novel became a huge bestseller, and an even more popular movie, he knew he'd never be able to set foot in Bush Falls again. Now, fifteen years later, he has no choice. Joe's father is gravely ill, so the town's most famous pariah must return. Joe is finally ready to face his past, and with the help of some old friends, he may actually learn something . . . if he manages to survive the homecoming.

In the tradition of Nick Hornby and Jennifer Weiner, Jonathan Tropper has created a book that will cause you to laugh and pause to reflect. The questions, discussion topics, and author biography that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Jonathan Tropper's **The Book of Joe**. We hope they will enrich your experience of this captivating novel.

## Discussion Guide

1. Homecoming lies at the heart of the novel. How has this theme played out in your own experience? How prominently does your past shape your current life?
2. The opening sentence of **The Book of Joe** combines references to sex and death. In what way do these powerful experiences recur together throughout the novel? How does Joe develop an understanding of mortality and sexuality during his adolescence?
3. The 1980s form a colorful backdrop to the novel, especially in terms of pop culture and lyrics. Can time period be

considered a character in **The Book of Joe**? In what other books? If so, how would you define and describe it?

4. The novel's title echoes the biblical Book of Job. Though Joe himself would probably reject that comparison, does he have much in common with Job?

5. What does **The Book of Joe** indicate about how communities label and treat outsiders? Why were the Cougars the most highly regarded male figures in Bush Falls for so many generations?

6. Joe readily admits that he embellished actual events in writing *Bush Falls*?after all, that's a fiction writer's prerogative. But his experience parallels the real-life quandaries of many novelists who are criticized when drawing on their own memories to inspire fiction. Was it unethical for Joe to use Bush Falls in the way he did? Why does he have such a hard time replicating the success of *Bush Falls* with his second novel?

7. What techniques does Jonathan Tropper employ to balance his comedic and somber tones?

8. Discuss the spectrum of parenting offered in **The Book of Joe**. How does Joe's family compare to that of his friends? What emotional scars do he and his brother bear from their mother's suicide? Is Owen a father figure to Joe, and if so, how would you characterize his "fathering?"

9. Referring to his brother's *bar mitzvah*, Joe muses that by missing out on his own coming-of-age celebration, he never became a man in the eyes of Judaism. Is Joe in fact any less mature or "less of a man" than his brother?

10. What does Joe's nephew Jared indicate about the way times have changed in Bush Falls, and in American adolescence in general? Why do you think the author gave Jared such a prominent role in the novel?

11. What ultimately caused Sammy's death? Is Coach Dugan's attempt to make amends during Wayne's funeral warranted?and sufficient?

12. When Joe discovers the hardcover copies of his book, along with a movie poster, prominently displayed in his father's room, what message was conveyed between father and son?

13. Discuss the novel's portrayal of second chances. Are Joe and his brother liberated from the pains of their past? What causes Brad's marriage and career to fall on hard times? How will the Goffman family use its second chances?

14. What does Joe's Mercedes signify throughout the novel? How do his feelings about the car reflect the personal changes he undergoes?

## Author Bio

Jonathan Tropper is the author of ONE LAST THING BEFORE I GO, HOW TO TALK TO A WIDOWER, EVERYTHING CHANGES, THE BOOK OF JOE and PLAN B. He lives with his family in Westchester, New York, where he teaches writing at Manhattanville College. He is currently adapting THIS IS WHERE I LEAVE YOU as a feature film for Warner Brothers Studios and is an Executive Producer and co-creator of the Cinemax series ?Banshee.?

## Critical Praise

"An elegiac, wickedly observant look at a small town and its secrets. In Jonathan Tropper's highly readable novel, the problem isn't that you can't go home again, it's that eventually you have to, whether you like it or not."

---

### **The Book of Joe**

by Jonathan Tropper

**Publication Date:** January 25, 2005

**Genres:** Fiction

**Paperback:** 368 pages

**Publisher:** Bantam

**ISBN-10:** 0385338104

**ISBN-13:** 9780385338103