

BOOK CLUB KIT

An illustration of two young men in baseball uniforms celebrating. The man in the foreground is wearing a green jersey with 'Prospects' on it and is shouting with his mouth wide open. The man behind him is also in a green jersey and is embracing him. They are on a baseball field with a blurred crowd in the background.

The Prospects

KT HOFFMAN

★ Discussion Questions ★

1. Which character resonated with you most? Why?
2. “Gene has no expectations of breaking into the majors. The career that he has—even if it pays like shit, runs him ragged, isn’t the career of anyone’s dreams—is still a fucking miracle for a guy like Gene,” Hoffman writes. What does it look like for Gene to reconcile the life he wants with the life he has at the beginning of the book?
3. Whether you are queer/trans or not, you can imagine having to weigh the pros and cons of coming out. How do you think Gene, Vince, and Baker—and later Luis—came to this place with regards to coming out to the team? In what ways do their experiences differ? Consider what coming out changed and what it didn’t.
4. “Gene can understand how lonely it can be to look different than the person you’d expect to find on a baseball card.” How does this speak to the increased scrutiny that marginalized people face, and the unrealistic standards of perfection that they are held to? How do you think this has an impact on Gene’s and Luis’s lives and careers? What about you and/or the people you love?
5. What was your favorite scene in the book?
6. How do you think Gene’s and Luis’s respective relationships to baseball are affected by having fathers who were professional players?
7. Gene talks about the part of himself that knew he was trans before he consciously acknowledged it to himself. How it ached every time he tried to shove it down. He also explains how the same part of him resurfaces in the presence of his attraction toward Luis, now that they’re on the same team again. Why do you think that is?
8. Luis experiences intense anxiety, and Gene finds pride and comfort in giving Luis moments where he can feel secure. What does Gene do right? Has this book made you think differently about supporting someone with severe anxiety? How so?
9. What are the differences between the professional versus the private lives of the characters in this book?
10. Although Vince, Gene, and Luis are all gay men, they have very different views of and experiences with masculinity and manhood. For example, Vince struggles to ask for help carrying his bag or driving to dinner, while Gene sees vulnerability as a strength. In what other ways do Gene’s feelings differ from Vince’s? What about Luis’s? Why might this be?
11. Gene tells Baker he is happy to be an openly trans baseball player, but that he also never quite asked to be the first. What are the good and bad parts of being the first openly trans baseball player? Or the first person of any underrepresented group to do something monumental?
12. How would you describe Gene and Luis’s relationship? What aspects of their relationship would you like (or do you have) in your own?
13. What rom-com tropes did you notice while reading this novel? Did you notice any tropes that were subverted, or presented in a way you wouldn’t expect?
14. Were there any other novels (or other media) that this story felt in conversation with? Elaborate on them, and their similarities and where they diverge with this book.

★ *Recipe: Gene's Bagels* ★

Yield: Makes 6 or 8, depending on how giant you want your bagels to be

People feel strongly about their bagel recipes. I mostly feel strongly that even people who live in Oregon deserve good bagels. Some tweaks to a traditional recipe: first, some purists say a bagel can't be a bagel without barley malt syrup, but it can be hard to find in stores. I listed some alternatives—I think any of these makes a great bagel! Second, I don't have a lot of time or especially good planning skills, so I don't let my dough rise in the fridge overnight. The only rule you absolutely cannot break, in my humble opinion, when making bagels: you have to (have to!!!) boil them before baking.

These are best if you eat them the day you make them, but they can be frozen or stored for a few days in a sealed container. You'll just probably want to toast them after day one. —Gene

These are extremely fucking good. —Luis

★★

Ingredients

- 7g / 2 ¼ teaspoons / 1 packet active dry yeast
- 4 teaspoons (plus 2 tablespoons extra for boiling) of one of the following yeast foods* (in order of my preference): barley malt syrup, molasses, or brown sugar
- 1 ¼ cups warm water†
- 480g / 4 cups‡ bread flour
- 10g / 1 ¾ teaspoons kosher salt

Optional toppings

- Everything seasoning
- Sea salt (Nada buys the fancy flaky kind & I like to steal it for bagels)
- Poppy seeds
- Cinnamon sugar
- Cheese
- Etcetera— the world is your bagel shop, baby!

* Yeast eats sugar, so any of these options work. I don't really get the science beyond that because I am a baseball player. (Nada is telling me baseball players should try reading a book every once in a while.)

† About 95–105°F. It should feel like when you're running a hot bath or a shower—you should be able to keep a hand in the water for at least a couple seconds. If you can't, it's probably too hot.

‡ A kitchen scale is the easiest way to measure this, but no worries if you don't have access to one! Just be sure you spoon and level the flour, rather than packing it into the cup.

★ *Recipe: Gene's Bagels* ★

Instructions

1. Combine the water, yeast, and four teaspoons of your yeast food of choice. Whisk with a fork and let rest for 5–10 minutes. A weird-looking sort of foam will form along the top when the yeast activates.
2. Measure out your flour and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer or a large mixing bowl. I highly recommend a stand mixer if you have it, but if you are really buff, and/or want to be really buff, and/or just don't have a stand mixer, it can be done by hand.
3. Attach the bread hook to your mixer and start mixing on the lowest speed as you drizzle in the wet ingredients. If you're going the mixer-less route, mix with a wooden spoon. It will look like there isn't enough water, but there is—it shouldn't be an especially wet dough. If you GOTTA add extra water, do it a teaspoon at a time.
4. Let your mixer keep kneading for 7–8 minutes on low speed (or knead by hand on the counter). The dough should be stiff and easily pull away from the sides of the bowl. It's ready when it feels elastic and smooth.
5. Form the dough into a ball. Lightly grease the bowl with cooking spray or another neutral oil, place the dough back into the bowl, cover with a lid or damp towel, and let rise on the counter for 1– 2 hours, or until more or less doubled.*
6. When the dough has risen, gently punch it down and let it rest for 10 more minutes.
7. During those 10 minutes, line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Preheat your oven to 425°F and set a large pot with approximately 2–3 quarts[†] of water and two tablespoons barley malt/molasses/ brown sugar to boil on the stove.
8. Divide dough into six or eight[‡] roughly equal portions. I personally like to weigh my dough out, but no worries if you need/prefer to eyeball it.
9. Shape your bagels. I personally roll each piece of the dough into a ball, then stretch a hole in the center. I'd recommend watching a video if this is your first time making bagels! Set your shaped bagels 2-ish inches apart on the baking sheet and cover with a towel.
10. When the water is boiling, carefully transfer 2–3 bagels at a time into the water bath. Don't crowd them. Boil for 90 seconds, then flip with a slotted spoon or spatula and boil for 90 more seconds. Remove from the water and place on the baking sheet.
11. If you're adding toppings, do so immediately after boiling—this helps them stick better. I personally don't like egg washes on bagels but do whatever floats your boat.
12. Repeat with remaining bagels.
13. Bake for 20–25 minutes, or until golden. They should sound hollow when tapped.
14. When they're cool enough to handle, you can slice them open and add whatever you'd like. I'm partial to grilled halloumi and tomatoes, egg and cheese, or a classic schmear. Follow your heart.
15. Share with a friend/teammate/colleague you sleep in the same room as sometimes/boyfriend /whoever.

** This will generally take closer to one hour in warm weather, and closer to two hours in cold weather.*

† I have never measured this in my life. I just fill a big spaghetti-cooking pot like . . . one-third to one-half full.

‡ If you want them to be the size you'd get in a bagel shop, do six. If you want to see your perpetually hungry boyfriend eat a whole bagel in thirty seconds flat, do eight.

★ Playlist ★

Gene Jonescu, Second Base

REBEL REBEL

David Bowie

WE RUN THIS

Missy Elliott

Luis Estrada, Shortstop

DRUMMING SONG

Florence + The Machine

LA BAMBA

Selena

Trevor Ross, Third Base

CALAMITY SONG

The Decemberists

Ernie Gonzales, Catcher

JUICE

Lizzo

Kyle Clark, Left Field

TIGHTROPE (FEAT. BIG BOI)

Janelle Monae

Charlie Cooper, First Base

FINS

Jimmy Buffett

Kyle Nguyen, Right Field

SEVEN NATION ARMY

The White Stripes

Kyle Rivera, Center Field

DESPUÉS DE LA PLAYA

Bad Bunny

Vince Altman, Starting Pitcher

BARRACUDA

Heart