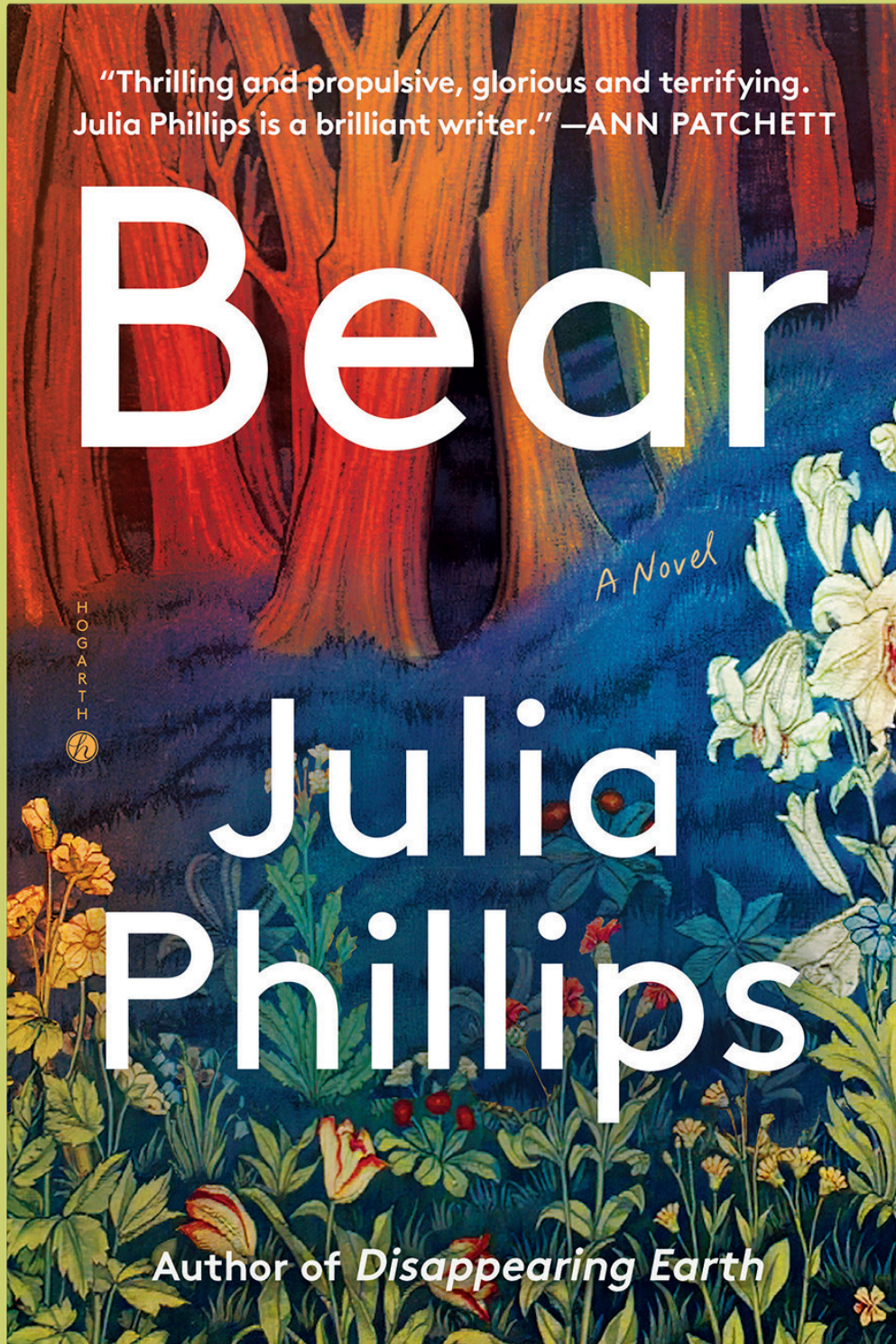


Book Club Kit



A Letter from the Author

Dear Reader,

Have you ever felt stuck? In a job, a relationship, a place—in the confines of your own body—in your life?

It's an awful feeling, isn't it? The sensation of being trapped, like an animal caught in steel teeth. You panic with it. You imagine yourself willing to gnaw off a limb to get free.

I associate this, my breath getting short and thoughts getting desperate, with my teenage years. I was stuck, then, in a place and self I didn't like. I dreamed of being someone else somewhere different. What soothed me then were books. Reading transforms and transports us: in books, we can enter other people's minds, jump to alternate realities, lift into new universes.

Reading books, I didn't feel fixed in place anymore. The world opened. And, god, what gorgeous stuff there is to see when you're unstuck! The lush fairy-tale beauty of nature, the wild and delicious times spent with friends. Dancing, traveling, laughing. Falling in love. Freedom.

And then, in 2020, life snapped shut again. I began to write this novel after more than a year spent with my partner and baby in our one-bedroom apartment, where first we didn't go out because of pandemic lockdown, and then because we were afraid, and then because we forgot any other way of being. The trap held tight.

It took a long time to remember the comfort of dreaming. Books reminded me, of course. They always do. This novel, which rose out of that stuck feeling, took me beyond the limits of my own existence. It transported me across the country, to Washington's lavender-scented San Juan Islands, and sank my arm wrist-deep in the golden fur of a bear.

Writing this book, about two sisters and the island where they were born and the animal that comes to their door, made me feel free. But isn't that always a part of why we turn to books? To leave ourselves behind, if only for a moment, and find something more? So I hope, with all my heart, that reading it will offer you the same experience. No matter where you're at right now, whether you're stuck yourself or moving easily, this story is made to take you into another, wider, wilder world, and I so, so hope you enjoy.

Yours,
Julia

Discussion Questions

1. The bear is a central figure in the story. What symbolic meanings or interpretations can you draw from its presence and actions throughout the novel?
2. How does the Pacific Northwest island setting shape the sisters' identities and their views on the world?
3. How do Sam and Elena's perspectives evolve throughout the novel, especially with their opposing reactions to the bear?
4. Which character did you relate to the most? Why?
5. Discuss the unraveling of Sam and Elena's dream of escape. Did Elena betray Sam by abandoning their plan? Or did Sam take their imaginings too seriously?
6. When did you feel like Elena had crossed the line with the bear?
7. What do you think Julia Phillips is trying to convey about the relationship between humans and nature, and the impact of the natural world on our lives?
8. What passages or scenes from the book will stay with you longest?
9. How do the portrayal of poverty and the sisters' relationship with their mother impact Sam and Elena's dreams, decisions, and the overall narrative?
10. What elements does *Bear* share with classic fairy tales?
11. Discuss the ending: how did it impact your interpretation of the story's themes and character arcs? Why do you think the author ended the novel this way?
12. If you could ask the author any question about this book, what would it be?

Pacific Northwest Vibes: A Book Club Playlist

Nirvana - "Smells Like Teen Spirit"

Pearl Jam - "Alive"

Soundgarden - "Black Hole Sun"

Alice In Chains - "Man in the Box"

Modest Mouse - "Float On"

Death Cab for Cutie - "Soul Meets Body"

Sleater-Kinney - "Jumpers"

The Shins - "New Slang"

Heart - "Barracuda"

Jimi Hendrix - "Purple Haze"

Built to Spill - "Carry the Zero"

The Decemberists - "Rox in the Box"

Band of Horses - "The Funeral"

Fleet Foxes - "White Winter Hymnal"

Mudhoney - "Touch Me I'm Sick"

"Snow-White and Rose-Red"

by the Brothers Grimm

Julia Phillips was inspired by this classic Brothers Grimm tale, reprinted below.

There was once a poor widow who lived in a lonely cottage. In front of the cottage was a garden wherein stood two rose-trees, one of which bore white and the other red roses. She had two children who were like the two rose-trees, and one was called Snow-white, and the other Rose-red. They were as good and happy, as busy and cheerful as ever two children in the world were, only Snow-white was more quiet and gentle than Rose-red. Rose-red liked better to run about in the meadows and fields seeking flowers and catching butterflies; but Snow-white sat at home with her mother, and helped her with her housework, or read to her when there was nothing to do.

The two children were so fond of one another that they always held each other by the hand when they went out together, and when Snow-white said: "We will not leave each other," Rose-red answered: "Never so long as we live," and their mother would add: "What one has she must share with the other." They often ran about the forest alone and gathered red berries, and no beasts did them any harm, but came close to them trustfully. The little hare would eat a cabbage-leaf out of their hands, the roe grazed by their side, the stag leapt merrily by them, and the birds sat still upon the boughs, and sang whatever they knew.

No mishap overtook them; if they had stayed too late in the forest, and night came on, they laid themselves down near one another upon the moss, and slept until morning came, and their mother knew this and did not worry on their account.

Once when they had spent the night in the wood and the dawn had roused them, they saw a beautiful child in a shining white dress sitting near their bed. He got up and looked quite kindly at them, but said nothing and went into the forest. And when they looked round they found that they had been sleeping quite close to a precipice, and would certainly have fallen into it in the darkness if they had gone only a few paces further. And their mother told them that it must have been the angel who watches over good children.

Snow-white and Rose-red kept their mother's little cottage so neat that it was a pleasure to look inside it. In the summer Rose-red took care of the house, and every morning laid a wreath of flowers by her mother's bed before she awoke, in which was a rose from each tree. In the winter Snow-white lit the fire and hung the kettle on the hob. The kettle was of brass and shone like gold, so brightly was it polished. In the evening, when the snowflakes fell, the mother said: "Go, Snow-white, and bolt the door," and then they sat round the hearth, and the mother took her spectacles and read aloud out of a large book, and the two girls listened as they sat and spun. And close by them lay a lamb upon the floor, and behind them upon a perch sat a white dove with its head hidden beneath its wings.

One evening, as they were thus sitting comfortably together, someone knocked at the door as if he wished to be let in. The mother said: "Quick, Rose-red, open the door, it must be a traveler who is seeking shelter." Rose-red went and pushed back the bolt, thinking that it was a poor man, but it was not; it was a bear that stretched his broad, black head within the door.

Rose-red screamed and sprang back, the lamb bleated, the dove fluttered, and Snow-white hid herself behind her mother's bed. But the bear began to speak and said: "Do not be afraid, I will do you no harm! I am half-frozen, and only want to warm myself a little beside you."

"Poor bear," said the mother, "lie down by the fire, only take care that you do not burn your coat." Then she cried: "Snow-white, Rose-red, come out, the bear will do you no harm, he means well." So they both came out, and by-and-by the lamb and dove came nearer, and were not afraid of him. The bear said: "Here, children, knock the snow out of my coat a little"; so they brought the broom and swept the bear's hide clean; and he stretched himself by the fire and growled contentedly and comfortably. It was not long before they grew quite at home, and played tricks with their clumsy guest. They tugged his hair with their hands, put their feet upon his back and rolled him about, or they took a hazel-switch and beat him, and when he growled they laughed. But the bear took it all in good part, only when they were too rough he called out: "Leave me alive, children, Snow-white, Rose-red, Will you beat your wooer dead?"

When it was bedtime, and the others went to bed, the mother said to the bear: "You can lie there by the hearth, and then you will be safe from the cold and the bad weather." As soon as day dawned the two children let him out, and he trotted across the snow into the forest.

Henceforth the bear came every evening at the same time, laid himself down by the hearth, and let the children amuse themselves with him as much as they liked; and they got so used to him that the doors were never fastened until their black friend had arrived.

When spring had come and all outside was green, the bear said one morning to Snow-white: "Now I must go away, and cannot come back for the whole summer." "Where are you going, then, dear bear?" asked Snow-white. "I must go into the forest and guard my treasures from the wicked dwarfs. In the winter, when the earth is frozen hard, they are obliged to stay below and cannot work their way through; but now, when the sun has thawed and warmed the earth, they break through it, and come out to pry and steal; and what once gets into their hands, and in their caves, does not easily see daylight again."

Snow-white was quite sorry at his departure, and as she unbolted the door for him, and the bear was hurrying out, he caught against the bolt and a piece of his hairy coat was torn off, and it seemed to Snow-white as if she had seen gold shining through it, but she was not sure about it. The bear ran away quickly, and was soon out of sight behind the trees.

A short time afterwards the mother sent her children into the forest to get firewood. There they found a big tree which lay felled on the ground, and close by the trunk something was jumping backwards and forwards in the grass, but they could not make out what it was. When they came nearer they saw a dwarf with an old withered face and a snow-white beard a yard long. The end of the beard was caught in a crevice of the tree, and the little fellow was jumping about like a dog tied to a rope, and did not know what to do.

He glared at the girls with his fiery red eyes and cried: "Why do you stand there? Can you not come here and help me?" "What are you up to, little man?" asked Rose-red. "You stupid, prying goose!" answered the dwarf: "I was going to split the tree to get a little wood for cooking. The little bit of food that we people get is immediately burnt up with heavy logs; we do not swallow so much as you coarse, greedy folk. I had just driven the wedge safely in, and everything was going as I wished; but the cursed wedge was too smooth and suddenly sprang out, and the tree closed so quickly that I could not pull out my beautiful white beard; so now it is tight and I cannot get away, and the silly, sleek, milk-faced things laugh! Ugh! how odious you are!"

The children tried very hard, but they could not pull the beard out, it was caught too fast. "I will run and fetch someone," said Rose-red. "You senseless goose!" snarled the dwarf; "why should you fetch someone? You are already two too many for me; can you not think of something better?" "Don't be impatient," said Snow-white, "I will help you," and she pulled her scissors out of her pocket, and cut off the end of the beard.

As soon as the dwarf felt himself free he laid hold of a bag which lay amongst the roots of the tree, and which was full of gold, and lifted it up, grumbling to himself: "Uncouth people, to cut off a piece of my fine beard. Bad luck to you!" and then he swung the bag upon his back, and went off without even once looking at the children.

Some time afterwards Snow-white and Rose-red went to catch a dish of fish. As they came near the brook they saw something like a large grasshopper jumping towards the water, as if it were going to leap in. They ran to it and found it was the dwarf. "Where are you going?" said Rose-red; "you surely don't want to go into the water?" "I am not such a fool!" cried the dwarf; "don't you see that the accursed fish wants to pull me in?" The little man had been sitting there fishing, and unluckily the wind had tangled up his beard with the fishing-line; a moment later a big fish made a bite and the feeble creature had not strength to pull it out; the fish kept the upper hand and pulled the dwarf towards him. He held on to all the reeds and rushes, but it was of little good, for he was forced to follow the movements of the fish, and was in urgent danger of being dragged into the water.

The girls came just in time; they held him fast and tried to free his beard from the line, but all in vain, beard and line were entangled fast together. There was nothing to do but to bring out the scissors and cut the beard, whereby a small part of it was lost. When the dwarf saw that he screamed out: "Is that civil, you toadstool, to disfigure a man's face? Was it not enough to clip off the end of my beard? Now you have cut off the best part of it. I cannot let myself be seen by my people. I wish you had been made to run the soles off your shoes!" Then he took out a sack of pearls which lay in the rushes, and without another word he dragged it away and disappeared behind a stone.

It happened that soon afterwards the mother sent the two children to the town to buy needles and thread, and laces and ribbons. The road led them across a heath upon which huge pieces of rock lay strewn about. There they noticed a large bird hovering in the air, flying slowly round and round above them; it sank lower and lower, and at last settled near a rock not far away. Immediately they heard a loud, piteous cry. They ran up and saw with horror that the eagle had seized their old acquaintance the dwarf, and was going to carry him off.

The children, full of pity, at once took tight hold of the little man, and pulled against the eagle so long that at last he let his booty go. As soon as the dwarf had recovered from his first fright he cried with his shrill voice: "Could you not have done it more carefully! You dragged at my brown coat so that it is all torn and full of holes, you clumsy creatures!" Then he took up a sack full of precious stones, and slipped away again under the rock into his hole. The girls, who by this time were used to his ingratitude, went on their way and did their business in town.

As they crossed the heath again on their way home they surprised the dwarf, who had emptied out his bag of precious stones in a clean spot, and had not thought that anyone would come there so late. The evening sun shone upon the brilliant stones; they glittered and sparkled with all colors so beautifully that the children stood still and stared at them.

"Why do you stand gaping there?" cried the dwarf, and his ashen-grey face became copper-red with rage. He was still cursing when a loud growling was heard, and a black bear came trotting towards them out of the forest. The dwarf sprang up in a fright, but he could not reach his cave, for the bear was already close. Then in the dread of his heart he cried: "Dear Mr. Bear, spare me, I will give you all my treasures; look, the beautiful jewels lying there! Grant me my life; what do you want with such a slender little fellow as I? You would not feel me between your teeth. Come, take these two wicked girls, they are tender morsels for you, fat as young quails; for mercy's sake eat them!" The bear took no heed of his words, but gave the wicked creature a single blow with his paw, and he did not move again.

The girls had run away, but the bear called to them: "Snow-white and Rose-red, do not be afraid; wait, I will come with you." Then they recognized his voice and waited, and when he came up to them suddenly his bearskin fell off, and he stood there a handsome man, clothed all in gold. "I am a king's son," he said, "and I was bewitched by that wicked dwarf, who had stolen my treasures; I have had to run about the forest as a savage bear until I was freed by his death. Now he has got his well-deserved punishment."

Snow-white was married to him, and Rose-red to his brother, and they divided between them the great treasure which the dwarf had gathered together in his cave. The old mother lived peacefully and happily with her children for many years. She took the two rose trees with her, and they stood before her window, and every year bore the most beautiful roses, white and red. ●

BEAR ATTACKS:

A Guide from the National Parks Service

Every encounter is different.

Bears exhibit different kinds of behaviors during different situations, and understanding the bear's behavior can make the difference between life and death.

There are two types of charges—bluff charges and aggressive charges.

Bluff charges are more common.

Bluff charges are meant to scare or intimidate. When a bear bluff charges, it will have its head and ears up and forward. The bear will puff itself up to look bigger. It will bound on its front paws toward you (moving in big leaps), but then stop short or veer off to one side. Often bears retreat after a bluff charge, or they may vocalize loudly.

If you can see a bluff charge is about to happen, slowly back away while waving your arms above your head and speak to the bear in a calm voice. When the bear charges you, hold your ground and stay calm. After the bear charges, slowly retreat while keeping an eye on the bear. Let the bear know that you're a human, and that you aren't a threat. Continue to speak to the bear in a calm voice and make it clear that you are a human.

Do NOT run during a bluff charge, it may trigger the bear to attack. Stand your ground. Be ready for the bear to make contact in case the charge is not a bluff charge. Know how to protect and defend yourself in case the bear turns aggressive.

Aggressive charges are very dangerous.

Bears may yawn or clack their teeth and pound their front paws on the ground while huffing—these are warning signs. These behaviors indicate that a bear is stressed, and it may be getting ready to charge. It will have its head down and ears pointed back, and the bear will come at you like a freight train.

If a black bear charges and attacks you, FIGHT BACK! Do not play dead. Direct punches and kicks at the bear's face, and use any weapon like rocks, branches, or bear spray to defend yourself.

If a grizzly/brown bear charges and attacks you, PLAY DEAD. Do not fight back! Cover your head and neck with your hands and arms. Lay flat on your stomach, and spread your legs apart. Keep your pack on, it will help protect you. Don't make any noise—you're trying to convince the bear that you aren't a threat. Do not get up right away because the bear may still be in the area. Wait until you are sure that the bear is gone.

Fighting back during an attack from a grizzly/brown bear will usually worsen the attack, but if the attack persists, then **fight back!**

What if I surprise a bear?

If you surprise a bear, regardless of the species, don't fight it. Unless the bear is acting predatory, do not fight it. This can cause the bear to act more aggressively toward you and trigger an attack.

If you surprise a bear, slowly and calmly back away while avoiding direct eye contact—the bear may see this as an aggressive or challenging behavior. Slowly and calmly speak to the bear, wave your arms to let the bear know you are a human. Pick up any small children or pets immediately. Watch the bear as you leave the area.

If you surprise a black bear and it charges or attacks, **fight back with everything you have!**

If you surprise a grizzly/brown bear and it charges or attacks, do not fight back! **Only fight back if the attack persists.**

Never run from a surprised bear because it can cause a predatory reaction from the bear. Do not try to climb a tree. You cannot outrun or out-climb a bear.

Predatory bears

Predatory bears are very different than surprised or defensive bears. If you encounter a bear that's curious or stalks you like a predator, be ready to fight. Do NOT run. Stalking and curious bears are not in a defensive mindset like a surprised bear. They are ready to attack their prey at a moment's notice, and YOU are the prey. Try to seek shelter in a car or building if possible. If that isn't an option, be ready to fight. If you notice a bear stalking you, now is the time to get your bear spray ready. If the bear attacks you, use any available weapon to fight the bear (sticks, rocks, bear spray, even your fists). **If a predatory bear attacks you, no matter the species, fight back with everything you have.**

Report all bear encounters.

If you are involved with a bear conflict or encounter, report it to park authorities as soon as possible. If the conflict is serious and cell service is available, call 911.

Source: [nps.gov/articles/bearattacks.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/bearattacks.htm)

