



Doubleday Reading Group Guide

THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT
A Novel by Chris Bohjalian
New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Guest Room*

When his calendar permits, Chris Bohjalian is available to meet with reading groups via Skype or speakerphone. Visit <http://www.chrisbohjalian.com/reading-group-center> for details.

Introduction

In his twentieth book, Chris Bohjalian takes riveting storytelling to a new cruising altitude. A mesmerizing tale of denial and revelation, *The Flight Attendant* opens in an opulent hotel suite in Dubai, where Cassandra Bowden awakens to find herself in bed with a dead man. He had been a passenger on her flight the day before. He was handsome, and a flirt. And when he asked her to rendezvous for a romantic dinner after they landed, she couldn't say no . . . just as she can't ever say no to the seductive pleasures of alcohol. This time, her binge-drinking has ended in bloody crime scene. But Cassie has no memory of any intruders. Could she have murdered her mysterious date? If not, who did?

Set in a world of high-stakes intrigue and glamorous jet-setters, *The Flight Attendant* is at once a literary thriller and a powerful meditation on the devastating consequences of addiction. This is a novel that is sure to stir lively conversations. We hope this guide will enrich your discussion. The questions contain a few spoilers, so you might want to hold off reviewing the guide until everyone in the group has finished the book.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What traits do Cassie and Elena ("Miranda") have in common, and what are their fundamental differences? Though they were raised worlds apart, how did their parents teach them to conceal their true selves? To what extent do both women manage to deceive themselves as well?
2. How did your opinion of Alex Sokolov shift as his life story unfolded? At first, what did you think was the motive behind his murder?
3. How is Cassie's dependence on alcohol linked to her dependence on lying? What is at the root of her cycle of intoxicated euphoria followed by self-loathing?
4. What accounts for the very different paths Cassie and her younger sister, Rosemary, take in life? How does their relationship compare to the one between you and your siblings?

5. What does *The Flight Attendant* say about the distinction between bad decisions and destiny? To what degree are Cassie and Elena in control of their misdirected choices?
6. Discuss the men in Cassie's life. What keeps her from experiencing real intimacy? What's different about Enrico?
7. In this novel, what did you learn about the cyber world and the real world after the fall of the Soviet Union? Does technology give you hope or make you worry?
8. When Cassie compulsively pilfers items while traveling and then wraps them up as gifts, is she simply trying to live on a limited budget, or does it say something deeper about her relationship to possessions and the images she wanted her loved ones to have of her?
9. As the flight attendants in the novel work a variety of international routes, what do their experiences prove about the common threads that exist in all of humanity, no matter where we are?
10. What does it take for Cassie to own up to her missteps? Before she met Alex, had she ever harmed anyone but herself?
11. As you read the FBI reports, what did you discover about information and power? Would you have followed the advice of attorney Ani Mouradian, telling the truth to the FBI?
12. Are the novel's characters either cold-blooded or compassionate, or are they some combination of each? Were you good at predicting which characters were the bad guys?
13. Even though she has logged thousands of miles in her career, Cassie still marvels at the miracle of flight when she sees a plane passing overhead. How did the novel enhance your appreciation for air travel and flight crews? What elements of the job surprised you the most? If you were in Cassie's line of work, which routes would you bid on most often?
14. In the novel and in your own experience, what does it ultimately take to become the person you always wanted to be?
15. What are the hallmarks of this author's storytelling? How was your experience of *The Flight Attendant* enhanced by the Bohjalian novels you've previously read?

About the Author

Chris Bohjalian is the author of twenty books, including *The Guest Room*; *Close Your Eyes, Hold Hands*; *The Sandcastle Girls*; *Skeletons at the Feast*; *The Double Bind*; and *Midwives*, which was a number one *New York Times* bestseller and a selection of Oprah's Book Club. His work has been translated into more than thirty languages, and three of his novels have become movies (*Secrets of Eden*, *Midwives*, and *Past the Bleachers*). He lives in Vermont and can be found at www.chrisbohjalian.com or on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Litsy, and Goodreads.

Also by Chris Bohjalian (Which have the members of your group read?)

The Sleepwalker

The Guest Room

Close Your Eyes, Hold Hands

The Light in the Ruins

The Sandcastle Girls

The Night Strangers

Secrets of Eden

Skeletons at the Feast

The Double Bind

Before You Know Kindness

Idyll Banter

The Buffalo Soldier

Trans-Sister Radio

The Law of Similars

Midwives

Water Witches

Past the Bleachers

Hangman

A Killing in the Real World

These 10 questions refer to the quotes, collected below, from reviews of a number of Bohjalian's works.

1. Which blurbs are most apt, and why?
2. Which miss the mark, in your opinion, and why?
3. What explains the broad range of critical response that any book receives, Bohjalian's work being no exception? Personal preference? Questions of style? Subject matter? Exceeded expectations? Disappointed expectations? Emotional state?
4. Fewer and fewer publications review books these days. How does that make a purchase decision more difficult? What other sources do you turn to?
5. How much credence do you give to reader reviews on sites like Amazon and Goodreads?
6. Do you think opening up reviewing to the public is for the better?

7. How would you describe Bohjalian's novels to someone who had never read him?
8. Which novel would you tell the novice to start with?
9. If you've read more than one, which is the quintessential Bohjalian novel?
10. Bohjalian writes two kinds of novels: contemporary literature such as *The Flight Attendant* or *The Guest Room*, and historical fiction such as *The Sandcastle Girls* or *The Light in the Ruins*. Which sort of novel do you prefer? Does he write one kind of book better than the other?

Praise for Chris Bohjalian

"Bohjalian is a master of literary suspense . . . His are the sorts of books people stay awake all night to finish." —*The Washington Post Book World*

"Few writers can manipulate a plot with Bohjalian's grace and power."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

"A writer of unusual heart." —*The Boston Globe*

"A literary novelist unafraid to reference Proust's madeleine and expect readers to get it. But his books are also filled with artfully drawn characters and great, passionate storytelling." —*The Seattle Times*

"Chris Bohjalian is a master of depicting the small moments—the inevitable routines—that follow in the wake of a trauma." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Bohjalian provides convincing portraits of humane, reasonable people undergoing enormous stress . . . He never underestimates the emotional costs that his characters have to pay for their actions." —*San Francisco Chronicle*

"A gifted writer . . . He weaves in hints, a red herring or two, and a backstory that will leave readers with competing theories." —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

"Chris Bohjalian savors the experience of getting behind his characters' masks, deep into their psyches." —*Portland Press Herald*

"Bohjalian doesn't write novels so much as he weaves them, one thread into the next. The result is a fine tapestry, delicately and perfectly constructed."
—*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

"Bohjalian's treatment of guilt and paranoia is realistic and downright scary."
—*Vancouver Sun*

"With each book, Bohjalian flexes his literary muscles." —*Entertainment Weekly*

“That Bohjalian can extract greater truths about faith, hope, and compassion from something as mundane as a diary is testament not only to his skill as a writer but also to the enduring ability of well-written war fiction to stir our deepest emotions.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Bohjalian subtly and skillfully manipulates our suspicions . . . trusting his readers to foment their own speculations.” —*The Boston Globe*

“Bohjalian specializes in the suspense created when people are cut off, physically and emotionally, from society.” —*Tucson Weekly*

“Bohjalian has a knack for creating nuanced, detailed first-person female characters.” —*The Seattle Times*

“A terrific writer and parsimonious in the way he issues information, slowly building an increasing sense of dread and excitement.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Great mystery writers, like great magicians, have the ability to hide the truth that’s right before your eyes.” —*USA Today*

“He respects his readers’ intelligence. He’s not afraid to write a big story with a lot of full-blooded characters.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Bohjalian gives us fine-grained detail and beautifully observed domestic psychology.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Bohjalian brings astounding sensitivity to his depiction of women.”
—*San Antonio Express-News*

“A social scientist accustomed to exposing the stories of people caught in marginal situations they can’t ignore and against which they will be forever measured.” —*Lambda Book Report*

“Bohjalian has long endowed his characters with a spark of humanity, even in the midst of brutality.” —*The Miami Herald*

“Great fiction . . . Un-put-down-able.” —*People*

“Bohjalian . . . understands trauma: how long it takes to recover from unimaginable pain, and how people who have never experienced it rarely understand.” —*Yankee magazine*

“Bohjalian’s stock in trade is tapping into the ethical dilemmas of modern-day life in a way that shows their human dimensions, the price we pay for being who we are.” —*New Orleans Times-Picayune*

“Haunting style, complex characters, and detailed research [bring Bohjalian’s] stories to life.” —*Contra Costa Times*

“A master craftsman . . . His is a voice that should be heard for many years to come.” —*Burlington Free Press*

“Bohjalian takes a mysterious situation and transforms it into a novel of immense imagination and emotion.” —*Rocky Mountain News*

“Bohjalian has pacing down to a brilliant science.” —Bookreporter.com

“A master at exposing the emotions of a highly charged situation and carefully dissecting controversy.” —*Library Journal*

“Readers will find themselves mesmerized by the irresistible momentum of the narrative and by Bohjalian’s graceful, lucid, irony-laced prose.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

“Bohjalian’s characters are as real as our own relatives.”
—*The Florida Times-Union*

“Fans of Bohjalian’s . . . know to expect the unexpected and, thanks to his creativity and cunning, readers usually get walloped by one heck of a plot twist by book’s end.” —*USA Today*

Guide written by Amy Clements