



Eat Joy Discussion Guide

One of the goals of Alameda County Reads is to build community through discussion of our selected book, *Eat Joy*. At the beginning of the discussion, ask people to introduce themselves. You can get people chatting with easy personal questions: Do you like to cook? Are you the cook in your household? What's your favorite comfort food?

At the close of the discussion, thank everyone for attending your discussion. Remind them to visit aclibrary.org/alameda-county-reads/ for information and other programs, including the Finale event on March 25 at 7 pm.

Below are a variety of discussion questions, from simple to complex and light to more serious. Pick and choose the ones you want to explore with your group or create your own!

- Before reading this collection, had you thought about the ways food evokes memories, provides comfort, or so thoroughly enmeshes with our emotional life? Why does food have that power?
- Is there a story from the book that has stayed with you, because it's your favorite story from the collection or because you really connected with the writer's experience? Or did a story stick with you because it is completely outside your experience?
- *Eat Joy's* editor, Natalie Eve Garrett, isn't sure exactly on which shelf at a bookstore or library this book would belong on. She says it "probably wouldn't be at home among cookbooks," although it does contain recipes. Where would you place the book? Memoir? Self-help? Literary essays? What aspects of the book did you most enjoy?
- Joy is sharp and sweet like a really good lemon, and one can feel joy even in the midst of dark times. In some of the stories, the joy is easy to see; in others, it is harder. Which stories felt joyful? In which stories did you not recognize joy? Have you thought about the difference between happiness and joy?
- Food and cooking can be an expression of our cultural backgrounds, a means to show care or connections, an indicator of class barriers, a struggle with addiction, or a political

statement about cultivation. Which stories stood out to you as making a strong statement about something important to the author?

- In many of the pieces, food is described as a marker of assimilation or as dietary changes brought on by colonialization. What is your relationship to the foods of your ancestors?
- One of the reasons the Library chose this book is because we know that sharing stories can build connections among people. Sharing food can also build connections. Is there a dish or type of food that propelled you to learn more about a different culture or country?
- How can this type of personal storytelling help break down barriers between people?
- Khakpour talks about cooking as a practice of living imperfection. Satyal describes baking as a creative liberation and resiliency practice. What has the acts of making and sharing food taught you?
- Certain foods can trigger memories and strong emotions. Are there foods that immediately take you to another time in your life or bring a loved one to mind?
- Is there a particular dish you prepare (or desire) when you are stressed? How about when you are feeling joyful?
- Did you try making any of the recipes in the book, or do you plan on trying any? How did they turn out?
- Many people have spent the pandemic at home with the luxury of cooking more and experimenting with recipes, but many people have lost income and have had trouble keeping food on the table. There are many stories in the media about long lines at food banks. What are some ways people can serve families that are struggling in our local area? What resources can you share?