

Reading Group Guide

The Summer of June

By Jamie Sumner



About the Book:

June Delancey is tired of being an anxious mouse. This summer, she's going to stop letting anxiety rule her life and be a lion instead. June starts off her summer of bravery by vowing to embrace her independence and help her newly single mom do the same. She also impulsively shaves her head, hoping it will calm the anxiety that causes her to pull out her hair. It doesn't work quite as June expects when her new haircut does catch the eye of poetry-quoting soccer star Homer Juarez. Soon, June is spending her days at the library where her mom works, playing chess with Homer, and planting a secret garden. However, June's mind has a mind of its own. When June's anxiety starts to overwhelm her again, it seems like everything she's worked for is about to fall apart. Luckily, June's fierce mother and her new friends are there to help, with poetry, plants, watermelon pie, and a whole lot of love.

Discussion Questions:

1. At the start of the book, June says “I am tired of being the nervous mouse girl who is scared all the time and runs from everything . . . This summer, I am going to be a *lion*.” (Chapter one) Why does June want to be a lion? What animal do you think you are? Do you ever wish you were a different animal like June does? If so, what animal do you wish you were, and why?
2. Why does June shave her head? Have you ever drastically changed something about the way you look? What was it, and why did you change it?
3. What are some of the ways June’s mom supports her? How do your parents or any other adults in your life support you? In what areas of your life do you wish you had more support?
4. Homer says he wants to be friends with June because she seems “different.” What do you think Homer means by this? Why is it important to him that June is different? Is Homer different too? How?
5. Homer calls June “rebel June.” Does June feel like a rebel? Does she *want* to be a rebel? How do you know?
6. What does June think Homer is going to be like? What is he actually like? Have you ever met someone who turned out to be not what you expected? Who was it, and in what ways did they surprise you?
7. Why do you think Homer quotes poetry instead of using his own words? Why is June the first person Homer has ever said a line of poetry to?
8. When Homer first approaches June at the library, June is resistant. June also throws away the packet of seeds Luis gives her. She says, “New people are not part of the summer plan.” (Chapter two) Why do you think June is so resistant to making new friends? Do you have a hard time or an easy time making friends?

9. How does the blue wig make June feel? Why? Do you have an item that makes you feel like that?

10. June cuts her hair after a girl at school makes fun of the scabs on her head. Why do you think people make fun of other people? Have you ever had to face this kind of bullying? How did you handle it?

11. June says, "I guess the library is full of lonely people." (Chapter eight) Do you think this is true? Do the people at the library where June's mom works seem lonely to you? Why or why not?

12. June begins each day at the library by checking the recent returns shelf. What is the recent returns shelf? Why do you think June likes it so much? Do you have a favorite area in your library? Where is it, and why do you like it?

13. In the author's note, Jamie Sumner says, "Mental health must be treated with respect and care." What is mental health? What does it mean to treat it with respect? Why is this important?

14. When Tandy throws away the seedlings the children have planted at the library, June gets very upset. She says, "Right now I am not mousy June. I am June the *lion*." (Chapter nine) Why does Tandy throwing away the seedlings bring out the lion in June? What do the seedlings mean to her?

15. June thinks, "The more I get my hands in the dirt, the less I have to fight the worry." (Chapter seventeen) Why do you think gardening is so helpful to June? Do you have any activities that help you keep your worries away? What are they?

16. To save her garden, June must speak in front of the library board. How does she find the courage to do this? Have you ever had to find the courage to do something that scared you? How did you do it?

17. What are the symptoms of June's anxiety? What are some things that trigger it for her? Which strategies and treatments help her?

18. June says, "My therapist, Gina, likes to say my mind has a mind of its own. It fixates on the strangest and most unreasonable things." (Chapter one) What are some of the strategies June uses to calm her anxiety? Do you ever feel like your mind has a mind of its own?

19. After June has a panic attack at the parade, Luis brings her a lavender plant. June observes, "His kindness hurts." (Chapter thirteen) What does she mean by this? Why would kindness be painful to her? Have you ever felt like this?

20. June calls Homer one of her "safe people." What does she mean by this? Who are June's other safe people, and why? Who are the safe people in your life? What makes them feel safe for you?

21. The book begins with a quote from the children's book *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney: "But there is a third thing you must do . . . you must do something to make the world more beautiful." Do you think June succeeds at this? How? Do you agree that this is a good goal to have? What would you do to make the world more beautiful?

22. Why is June so determined to get her mom to date Daniel? Why does June dislike Sam so much at first, even though her mother likes him? What makes June change her mind?

23. At the parade, June thinks about Homer, "it shouldn't bother me that he's having such a good time today. But it does. He has no idea how hard this is for me." (Chapter twelve) Have you ever felt upset that something that is hard for you is easy for someone else? How did you manage that feeling?

24. Eventually, June decides to move her seedling, Theresa, outside with the other plants. June thinks, "Maybe she needs to be with her friends to grow." (Chapter thirteen) How do June's friends help her grow?

25. How does June change over the course of the book? Do you think she is a lion by the end, like she wanted to be? Why or why not?

26. Do you think things will be different for June when she goes back to school in the fall, after the events in *Summer of June*? Why or why not?

Extension Activities:

1. In *The Summer of June*, June and her friends create a community garden at the library. Create a poster or slideshow explaining what community gardens are and how they help communities.

To get started, try doing an internet search for “community gardens” and your town or a major city. For example, there are a lot of community gardens in New York City and in Oakland, California.

You can also check out this video about one man who has made a network of community gardens in Harlem:

<https://www.pbs.org/video/harlem-grown-oasis-new-york-city-xkez7e/>

If you’d like, visit a local community garden and take photographs or make a video for your presentation.

2. June and her friends plant a secret garden behind the library. Imagine you are planting your own garden. Make a list of what you will plant, and why. If you’d like, you can use a seed catalog or website to get ideas for different flowers, herbs, and vegetables. Then draw a map showing how you would arrange your garden, or make a collage of your garden using pictures cut out of a seed catalog.

3. In the author’s note, Jamie Sumner says, “Mental health must be treated with respect and care.” Make a poster or create a slideshow defining what mental health is. Then choose one mental illness, such as anxiety or depression, and explain its symptoms, different ways

it can be treated, and how friends and family can support a loved one who has this illness.

4. *The Summer of June* ends right before June returns to school for the year. Write the story of June's first day back at school. What do you think things are like for her at school now? Does she have any more encounters with Allyson? Does she stay friends with Homer now that the summer is over? Does she grow her hair back or keep it short? How is she doing with her anxiety?

5. June's therapist, Gina, often asks June: "If your life had a soundtrack, what song would be playing right now?" (Chapter thirteen) Make a soundtrack, or a list of songs, for your own life. What would play when you're happy, worried, or angry; when you're hanging out with your friends; or during other important times in your life? Be sure to explain why you chose each song. If you'd like, create the playlist in your favorite music app.

6. Homer finds it easiest to communicate through poetry, and June is amazed when Homer writes a poem about her. Try your hand at being a poet. Write a poem about someone who is important to you. Your poem can rhyme, like Homer's poem does, or it can be free verse, which is poetry that does not rhyme.

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