

Discussion Questions

Hello, Sunshine by Laura Dave

1. In chapter 1, Sunshine confides in the reader that she keeps score on the ways Danny's beauty compared to hers. In what ways are we all tempted to "keep score" of the goings on around us?
2. Sunshine tells the reader that they need to know two things, the second being that she's a "bad person." Why do you think she feels that way? Do you think Sunshine is a bad person, or a person who's behaved badly? Did your opinion change as you continued reading?
3. Ryan prefers the term "the story" over the words "lie" or "truth." How do you think the human impulse toward storytelling allows us to soften our version of events?
4. In chapter 4, Sunshine confesses that sometimes not performing for Danny feels "like the hardest performance of all." Why do you think authenticity, or the gaze of a loving observer, sometimes feels harder than artifice?
5. Sunshine posits in chapter 6 that the one thing women don't want to forgive is another adulterous woman. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Do you think female adulterers suffer more judgment than male adulterers?
6. Sunshine describes Montauk as a "show that didn't look like one, which was a show all in itself." When you watch TV, which worlds seem the most authentic to you? Think about the Food Network or daytime talk shows—"reality" TV—and divulge which ones tap into your expectations of authenticity.
7. Chapter 20 opens with Sunshine suggesting that readers may expect this to be a story about a woman realizing that her childhood home is where she always belonged. Were you expecting the narrative to turn out that way? Were you expecting to be called out on that assumption by the narrator? What did you think of that challenge to your own narrative expectations?
8. Eventually, Sunshine realizes that she had already chosen her dream over her marriage. Have you ever looked back at a moment and realized something about your own motivations that you hadn't at the time? Could you relate more to Sunshine in the present or past??
9. Sunshine and Rain have a fraught relationship; why do you think the author chose to make them contentious instead of using a "loving long-lost sister" trope?

10. Sunshine realizes on page [161] that her curated photos with Danny might have sent the message to him that “the way it actually was hadn’t been enough.” Has there ever been a time when you’ve sent misleading messages to friends or family, using social media or some other means?
11. Sunshine is tempted—even prepared—to lie to Chef Z about what happened with Amber and the peaches, but she doesn’t. Do you agree with her sentiment that when you’re out of practice, lying can be “almost as hard as telling the truth?”
12. Ethan brings a lot of clarity to Sunshine’s life, especially his thoughts on the word “curate.” Were you rooting for them to connect romantically? Or were you hoping Danny would forgive Sunshine and welcome her home?
13. Sunshine comes to realize that she and her father—and likely her sister—all had their rules about living that allowed them to hide from their insecurities. In what other ways do people try to run or hide from the fear that they’re not good enough? Do you think everyone fears the same inadequacies?
14. Where you pleased with the novel’s resolution? Did it align with your expectations or hopes for Sunshine when you started reading?

(Questions from publisher’s website.)

