



Meath County Council Library Service



Meath County Council Library Service Book Club Kit



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meath county council



Notes To Readers



This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *Weather* and contains spoilers

Content Warnings

Please be aware that *Weather* contains content that may trigger including themes of climate change, anxiety, aging and death




Reading Group Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Offill named her novel *Weather*? In what ways does weather show up as a theme in Offill's novel?
2. *Weather* is written in micro-moments. Lizzie's narrative is comprised of sentence and sometimes paragraph-long segments that build into a larger story. What was the experience like to read a narrative like that? How does this unique format serve the story and its contemporary, zeitgeisty setting?
3. How does Lizzie change over the course of the story? What specific examples did you see of her changing, or lack thereof?
4. How would you characterize Lizzie's relationship with her brother, Henry? Compare and contrast it with other relationships Lizzie has a duty to uphold, such as with her husband, Ben, and son, Eli?

5. Before the novel begins, Offill includes a quotation as an epigraph. Let's review it now:

Voted, that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; voted, that the earth is given to the Saints; voted, that we are the Saints.

NOTES FROM A TOWN MEETING IN MILFORD, CONNECTICUT, 1640
How do these notes from a town meeting in Milford, Connecticut, in 1640, more than 350 years old, connect to themes in *Weather*? Would Lizzie consider herself to be a "Saint"? Would you?




6. What do you make of Lizzie's answer? How is her view supported by her actions, emotions, and thoughts? Do you agree with her answer, that "the core delusion is that I am here and you are there"?

7 – One of the odder recurring themes in *Weather* is teeth. Discuss some of the ways that dentistry shows up throughout the novel. Why does it play such a big part in the fifth and final chapter, the ending of the story?

8 – Lizzie's husband is a Classicist. Ben has a PhD in Classics, but he takes a stable, paying job creating educational games rather than deal with the stresses of academia. Still, the Classics show up again and again, and it's clear that Ben has a passion for them as he is often reading about ancient life. How does his passion for Classics mirror Lizzie's interest in the future? Does Offill suggest there is common ground between the past and future?

9 – Although Lizzie does not often directly identify herself as anxious, *Weather* undeniably incorporates anxiety as a theme. Can you think of some ways that Lizzie grapples with, overcomes, or surrenders to anxiety? How did this novel make you feel?

10 – At the close of the novel, review Lizzie and her family's situation. Would you say that *Weather* ends with a sense of hope? If so, where do you find it? Or do you believe the ending is more pessimistic, or perhaps a mix of both moods?





Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors



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Some titles included in the site may be suitable for young adult readers, who are in the process of 'crossing-over' to adult novels.

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About Jenny Offill



She spent her childhood years in various American states, including Massachusetts, California, Indiana, and North Carolina, where she attended high school and received a BA degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and later, at Stanford University, was a Stegner Fellow in Fiction. After graduating, she worked a number of odd jobs: waitress, bartender, caterer, cashier, medical transcriber, fact-checker, and ghost-writer.

Offill's first novel, *Last Things*, was published in 1999. It was a New York Times Notable book and a finalist for the L.A Times First Book Award. Offill's second novel, *Dept. of Speculation*, was published in January 2014 and was named one of the 10 Best Books of 2014 by the New York Times Book Review. *Dept. of Speculation* has been shortlisted for the Folio Prize in the UK, the Pen/Faulkner Award and the L.A. Times Fiction Award. In 2016 Offill was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. Her work has appeared in the *Paris Review*. She is also the co-editor with Elissa Schappell of two anthologies of essays and the author of several children's books. Offill's short fiction has appeared in *Electric Literature* and *Significant Objects*.

Her third novel, *Weather*, was shortlisted for the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction, and in December 2020, Emily Temple of Literary Hub reported that the novel had made 13 lists of the best books of 2020.



Interview with Jenny Offill

Do you show your work to people as you're writing?

I tend to be someone who wants to write the whole thing before I show it to anyone. It's not ideal, because I'm also really, really slow. It's such a private language, when you're in the middle of a book, and there's an associational, dream logic quality to the way I write. Donald Barthelme talks about the 'not-knowingness' of writing fiction. I live in that state for many years, and then it can be a course correction, when you do show it to somebody. I never really want suggestions exactly, but there is a fear that maybe it won't make sense to anyone else. At the same time, sharing my work too much diffuses whatever mystery there is for me in the writing of it, and then I stop being able to hear what I'm doing.

I recently heard an interview with Claire Messud, where she said that when she's teaching fiction workshops, she always asks her students to describe what they see in their peers' work, rather than making suggestions about what should change.

I made a joke in my workshop that I would get them all T-shirts that said 'I wanted to know more'. The nature of workshops, the way that they're structured, means they lean towards the writer adding things: OK, we don't know enough about this person, we don't know enough about this event, can you show us more clearly what this scene is about? But if you're someone who is trying to move to a more pared-down language, or language that is trying to do things at a couple of different levels at the same time, the workshop environment can be difficult. So I try to teach my students to read at the line level, because I think that's what's helpful: to start thinking about what they're writing line by line, as well as the bigger picture. I'm also always trying to make them read things in different genres: poetry or essays or non-fiction or primary sources from science or anthropology. I want them to get a sense of the strangeness of language. It reminds you that there are all these different ways in which you can create density and give a vital feeling to the words on the page.

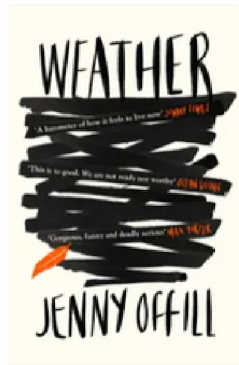
When you were writing DEPT. OF SPECULATION, did it start big and then you cut it down?

No, I never start big. I write these little things, and I don't know how they're going to fit together. I was just reading Frank O'Hara's 'Personism' Manifesto, where he says you just have to go on nerve. That's what it is: I know things go together, but I have no idea how. I just know they have a sort of...a slightly magnetic quality. They're not sticking, but if you hold them together, there's a tiny charge. So I'm just trying to figure out where the things go.



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Weather
Jenny Offill



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Last Things
Jenny Offill



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Dept. of Speculation
Jenny Offill
On Loan,
Available on 27/02/23

eAudiobooks

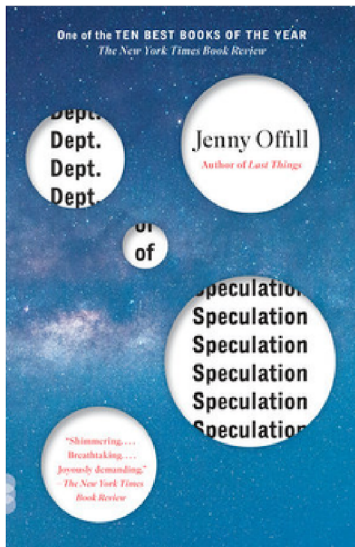


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Weather
Jenny Offill



More from Jenny Offill



In the beginning, it was easy to imagine their future. They were young and giddy, sure of themselves and of their love for each other. “Dept. of Speculation” was their code name for all the thrilling uncertainties that lay ahead. Then they got married, had a child and navigated the familiar calamities of family life—a colicky baby, a faltering relationship, stalled ambitions. When their marriage reaches a sudden breaking point, the wife tries to retrace the steps that have led them to this place, invoking everything from Kafka to the Stoics to doomed Russian cosmonauts as she analyzes what is lost and what remains. In language that shimmers with rage and longing and wit, Offill has created a brilliantly suspenseful love story—a novel to read in one sitting, even as its piercing meditations linger long after the last page.



To eight-year-old Grace Davitt, the world is full of strange wonders. Through the eyes of her mother, Anna—an ornithologist who speaks five languages—their small lakeside town in Vermont becomes a glittering mystery filled with secret tongues, monsters in the lake, and birthday parties for the Earth. Anna’s untamed spirit stands in sharp contrast to that of Grace’s father, a chemistry teacher who examines his surroundings through the lens of rationalism and order. As Grace’s family begins to fall apart and she finds that she must choose between her parents, her conflicting loyalties take her on a remarkable journey that spans all corners of the country—and of her own boundless imagination.