

# SUCH SHELTERED LIVES

A NOVEL

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READING GROUP GUIDE

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BY ALYSSA SHEINMEL

## Reading Group Questions & Topics for Discussion

(Warning: Spoilers ahead!)

1. Despite the main characters' privileged backgrounds, Amelia, Florence, and Edward have troubles that cross socioeconomic boundaries—addiction, eating disorders, grief. Are you able to relate to Amelia, Florence, and Edward? Why or why not?
2. Do you think any of the novel's main characters are "likeable"? Does a book need a likeable main character to be compelling, and does a character need to be likeable to be sympathetic?
3. *Such Sheltered Lives* has three first-person narrators. Was there one character whose chapters you looked forward to more than the others? Do you like reading books with multiple narrators? Why or why not?
4. Throughout the novel, there are interludes from the perspective of Shelter Island locals, revealing that simmering tensions between the locals and the summer people can be stark. How did the interludes impact the way you read the main storyline?
5. Though she tries to appear confident and unflappable, Florence is wracked with insecurity—about her abilities as a writer; her failings as a mother, daughter, and wife; her relevance as she ages and the music world goes on without her. Which do you think is the real Florence—the brash woman who faces the world bravely, or the insecure woman who doubts her every choice? Is it possible that she's both?
6. Years after her mother Georgia's death, Amelia discovers things she never knew about her. In some ways, Amelia feels closer to Georgia now, all this time later. At the end of the novel, do you think Amelia has found peace regarding her relationship with her mother? Is it possible to build a connection to the people we've lost that's stronger than the one we had when they were still with us?
7. Do you think Edward will return to England? Will he continue to have a relationship with his family, or will he leave them behind as his mother did before him? Knowing what you know about Edward's family, how do you feel about the way his mother left him behind?



8. While at the center, Florence writes a song called “Imposter Syndrome.” *Imposter Syndrome* is defined as a psychological pattern where individuals doubt their skills and accomplishments despite evidence to the contrary, fearful that they will be exposed as frauds. Florence wrestles with imposter syndrome like so many of us, particularly women. Does this struggle explain or excuse some of her behavior? Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome? Does it make you feel more connected to a character like Florence, despite her privilege and behavior?
9. Florence’s final song is titled “The Good Mother”; it’s about the mother she was and the mother she still hopes she can become. Many of the mistakes she made were because she was trying to protect her daughter. Do you think Florence is, at least on some level, a good mother, even with her many flaws?
10. Andrew and Evelyn aren’t held legally responsible for the damage they did, though—as Amelia reflects—leaving them alone on the island feels like its own small punishment. Do you feel that they got what they deserved? Why or why not?
11. Do you think that any of Rush’s Recovery’s practitioners had their patients’ best interests at heart? Why or why not? At the end of the novel, Amelia and Edward both want to recover—do the care managers they worked with deserve any credit for that, or do Amelia and Edward want to get better *despite* the care they received?
12. Author Alyssa Sheinmel has written that the idea for *Such Sheltered Lives* began with an article about an exclusive rehabilitation center in Switzerland. She wondered what might lead someone to a place most of us don’t even know exists. What do you think about real-life places like Rush’s Recovery, and the people they serve?

## Enhance your experience with the *Such Sheltered Lives* Playlist & Watchlist

*A note from author Alyssa Sheinmel:* Music plays a large part in *Such Sheltered Lives*—music the characters make, hear, and overhear; songs they love and hate. So it was inevitable that some of my favorite music and musicians would be a major source of inspiration. 90s-era classic rock looms large in the novel: one of the main characters, Amelia Blue Harris, is the daughter of a GenX rockstar, and another, Florence Bloom, still idealizes the music of the 1990s. I'm a big Taylor Swift fan, so I can't possibly make a playlist for *Such Sheltered Lives* without including some of her music. Two of my favorite songwriters, Stevie Nicks and Carly Simon, are also on the list, along with the (fictional) band Daisy Jones & the Six; when I got the idea for *Such Sheltered Lives*, I knew music would be a big part of the story, but I wasn't quite sure how to integrate it. Luckily, it was around that time that I read Taylor Jenkins Reid's *Daisy Jones & the Six*. Reid's wonderful book showed me that novelists are allowed to write lyrics, too.

### PLAYLIST

“Little Earthquakes” by Tori Amos  
“Better than Revenge (Taylor’s Version)” by Taylor Swift  
“Heart Shaped Box” by Nirvana  
“Aurora” by Daisy Jones and the Six  
“I’m Only Happy When it Rains” by Garbage  
“Gypsy” by Fleetwood Mac  
“Fear” by Sarah McLachlan  
“Boys in the Trees” by Carly Simon  
“Doll Parts” by Hole  
“Bigger than the Whole Sky” by Taylor Swift

When I began writing *Such Sheltered Lives*, my research didn't only include reading books and articles about addiction, eating disorders, the aristocracy, and treatment centers (though I read plenty of those!), but also watching movies and TV shows that touched on the same topics. As so often happens, some of my most impactful research came from unexpected places—not only when I picked up a memoir on addiction and its narrator also had insight into disordered eating, but also when I watched a special from one of my favorite stand-up comedians, and heard stories from his own time in rehab. Not only perusing pictures of GenX celebrities in their hey-day, but re-watching movies and TV shows that I'd watched and loved years earlier. My research was both deliberate and unexpected—my favorite combination.

## WATCHLIST

- *Daisy Jones & the Six*
- *The White Lotus*
- *The Crown*
- *To the Bone*
- *Nine Perfect Strangers*
- *John Mulaney: Baby J*
- *Outrageous: Based on the True Story of the Mitford Sisters*
- *Behind the Music*
- *Girl, Interrupted*
- *Postcards from the Edge*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alyssa Sheinmel is the *New York Times* bestselling author of several novels for young adults, including *A Danger to Herself and Others*, *The Castle School for Troubled Girls*, and *Faceless*. *Such Sheltered Lives* is her adult debut. Alyssa grew up in Northern California and New York and currently lives and writes in New York. Follow her on Instagram @AlyssaSheinmel or visit her online at [AlyssaSheinmel.com](http://AlyssaSheinmel.com).