# The Swimmers Book Club Questions

1. The swimmers in the book are all bonded by their love of the pool. Which of the "characters" reasons for swimming did you identify with the most? Why?

2. Alice is mentioned in the first chapter of the book, described as "a retired lab technician now in the early stages of dementia".

How long did it take you into the book to realize she was one of the central characters? What clues did you see along the way that she might be important?

3. Alice says "Up there, I'm just another little old lady. But down here, at the pool, I'm myself." What do you think she meant by that?

4. Julie Otsuka's writing style includes a lot of very long lists to describe the people who frequent the pool.

Did you find the rhythm of these lists pulling you into the book? Or did you find it harder to digest because of them? What did you like (or dislike) about this writing device?

5. The swimmers' personality types are partially broken down by what speed of swim lane they use.

"The fast-lane people are the alpha people of the pool." "The medium-lane people are visibility more relaxed than their fast-lane brethren." "The slow lane people…Be kind to them."

When reading about the personality types, which approach did you most identify with? Why?

6. In the book, Otsuka describes the swimmers as thinking about the pool constantly (even before falling asleep), but having to hide their "obsession" from everyone in their lives.

Why do you think they feel they can't be honest about their passion for the pool? Is there anything in your life you downplay interest in thinking friends and family "just won't understand"?

7. The mental benefits of the repetitiveness of swimming is highlighted multiple times in the book. One character writes their lectures in their head as they swim and another figures out a medical issue.

Why do you think the author talks so much about the benefits of the pool? How does this contrast with Alice's confusion later on?

8. The crack appearing in the pool is a massive deal to the swimmers. "At first it is barely visible, a faint dark line just south of the drain in the deep end of lane four."

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What do you think the crack showing up is supposed to symbolize in the larger context of the book? What is it foreshadowing?

9. There is a huge variety of reactions to the crack in the pool, from swimmers getting out and never coming back to swimmers making friends with it.

What do you think would have been your reaction? Did the strong responses across the spectrum make sense to you?

10. When it's announced the pool will close, the reactions are equally as extreme.

"But I thought that we could stay down here forever." Another, "I wish I'd never learned to swim." Some feel "strangely relieved. The terrible thing we have been waiting for has finally happened."

This sums up a larger human reaction to endings: those who prefer certainty even when the news is bad, vs. those who prefer to put off endings as long as possible. Which do you relate to more? Why?

11. The second half of the story focuses entirely on Alice and her family. Alice finally having to enter a care home and her families struggle with it emotionally, even when they know it's necessary, is a story played out in real life every day.

How did reading about this experience make you feel?

12. Alice's daughter tells the story of Alice's life by comparing what she remembers on a given day versus what she forgets.

How do you think the author treats the role of memory in the book? Had you thought about memory in this way before?

13. If you could recommend this book to anyone, who would you most want to read it? What would you want them to get out of it?

14. The book is very segmented into the section that's about the pool, and the section about Alice and her decline into total memory loss.

Did how the story unfolded surprise you? Is the book ultimately about what you expected it to be?

15. After you finished **The Swimmers**, was there anything that stuck with you that you kept thinking about? What was it?