

JULIE GERSTENBLATT

Author of *Daughters of Nantucket*

"Filled with tension, excitement, and brilliant plot twists.... Luminous."

—FIONA DAVIS,
New York Times
bestselling author of
The Stolen Queen



a novel

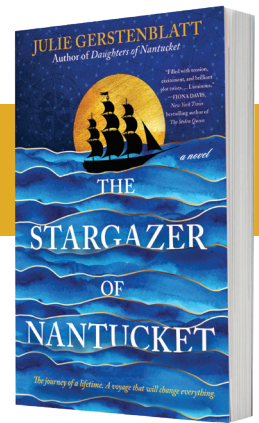
THE
STARGAZER
OF
NANTUCKET

BOOK CLUB
KIT

The journey of a lifetime. A voyage that will change everything.

Discussion Guide

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

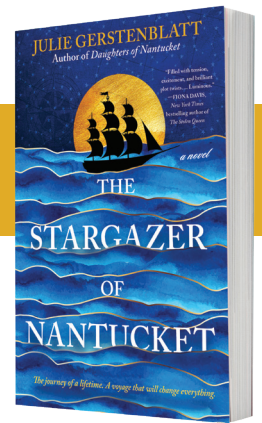


1. The novel begins with a prologue, in which readers learn the secret of the *Shooting Star*. How does this affect your experience as a reader?
2. Winnie's choice to stow away is an extremely daring one. What would you have done in her situation? How would you have reacted upon discovering her if you were Nell or Peter?
3. Historical fiction is a unique genre, in that it blends factual research with fictional storytelling. Discuss why an author might choose to write such a novel and why you choose to read historical fiction versus other genres.
4. *Stargazer* explores the personal and global effects of American ambition. Many characters in the story take great risks to try to get what they want, including but not limited to Winnie, Peter, Sully, Zander, Chin, Nell, and Joseph. How does the backdrop of the clipper ship era, the Gold Rush, and the Opium Trade inform their actions?
5. How is America in 1851 similar to—and different from—the United States today?
6. This book has a huge cast of characters, including some colorful minor players. Who were some of the most memorable characters for you and why? Who do you identify with the most?
7. The author chose to tell this story using omniscient narration, in which the narrator has full access to the thoughts, feelings, and action of multiple characters at any given time. Did you like this stylistic decision? Do you feel it impacted how you experienced the story and identified with various characters?
8. Discuss the marriage between Peter and Nell Starbuck. How are they like and unlike other couples from the 1800s? How might their union compare to a modern relationship?
9. There are several plot twists. What surprised you, and what did you see coming? Which moments in the novel stood out most to you and why?
10. The novel has a three-act structure: Fair Winds and Following Seas, The Golden Gate, and Semper Porro. Discuss the novel's structure and how structure impacts a reading experience.
11. What did you learn from reading *The Stargazer of Nantucket*?

Discussion Guide

Q&A WITH JULIE GERSTENBLATT

The *Stargazer of Nantucket* is a stand-alone novel, but it is set in the same world as your previous book, *Daughters of Nantucket*. Can you talk about how you came up with the idea for *Stargazer* and how it is connected to *Daughters*?



There is so much history to mine from Nantucket. As I researched and wrote *Daughters*, which is set around Nantucket's Great Fire of 1846 and takes place entirely within one square mile of the downtown center, I kept thinking about this *other* Nantucket family, merchants who travelled the globe and hardly spent any time actually living on the island they called home. After all, so many Nantucketers took to ships (whether for whaling or for trade) to create incredible financial gain by risking life and limb on the high seas.

As I visited museums and stately historic homes throughout New England, I kept thinking about how interesting it would have been to traverse the globe and buy up all the gorgeous goodies that were used by Americans every day at the time, from colorful porcelain urns to Oriental carpets and silk drapes. I imagined a husband-and-wife team evaluating objects, fabrics, and furniture—and tea, most of all—and wondered about the hard work of these artisans, merchants, and sailors behind the splendor and wealth.

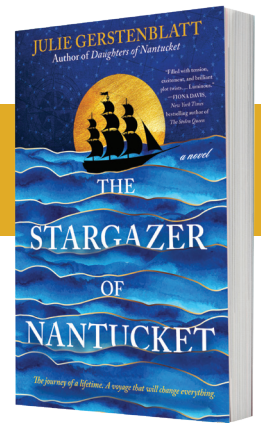
Simultaneously, I was editing *Daughters* for publication. In the original manuscript, Eliza Macy had two good friends, librarian and astronomer Maria Mitchell and a sea merchant who I named Nell Starbuck. These two characters served a similar purpose in the story, both providing companionship and guidance to Eliza. My editor suggested that I combine them, saying that one good, strong friendship was more impactful than two so-so ones. Someone had to go. So I cut Nell Starbuck from the novel.

Except! I didn't cut her out *entirely*. I left a few sentences in *Daughters of Nantucket* (which can be found on page 75 of the paperback) mentioning how Eliza has grown closer to Maria Mitchell while Nell is off "setting sail on global adventures" with her husband. And then I thought, well, maybe these Starbucks should be the central characters in my next novel! I also decided that a minor character I love from *Daughters of Nantucket*, namely one Joseph Allen, would be all grown up and off at sea just in time for us to cross paths with him in the Starbucks' story.

Lastly, I met with a lot of book groups after *Daughters* came out, and many people asked what happened next in the story, which is a bit open-ended. I decided to have some fun and plant easter eggs in *Stargazer* that would answer those questions. Although each is a stand-alone novel, I think of them as linked, with characters who inhabit the same universe.

Discussion Guide

Q&A WITH JULIE GERSTENBLATT



What was the hardest part about writing *Stargazer*? The easiest?

As a landlubber who gets seasick, the hardest part was the sailing! Whether you call this a maritime novel or a nautical novel, the fact is, there's a lot of sailing happening in these 400 pages. Maybe if only one scene was set at sea, I could pretend to know what I was talking about, but with the majority of the novel set on a clipper ship, I had to really make sailing feel authentic. I often boast about how I was a Red Cross Expert Sailor at my sleepaway camp in Maine, but capsizing and righting my own Sunfish on Sebago Lake in 1984 wasn't going to cut it. Neither is membership at the Barrington Yacht Club, where my husband and I socialize in the summers although we do not actually own a boat. (It's a very pretty place to drink wine and watch the sunset!)

I read a lot of accounts of rounding Cape Horn and watched a lot of films set at sea and relied on several experts to ensure that I captured as best as possible all the feels of being at sea.

The easiest part was actually something that might seem complicated, namely using omniscient narration to tell the story. Once Andrew and Arthur (see dedication and acknowledgments for more on them) suggested it to me, the story immediately opened up. I could imagine what Cook was thinking and Red and Chin and on and on. Everything happening on the *Stargazer* suddenly made so much sense—and I knew readers would enjoy getting to hear from so many colorful characters.

How long did it take you to write *Stargazer*?

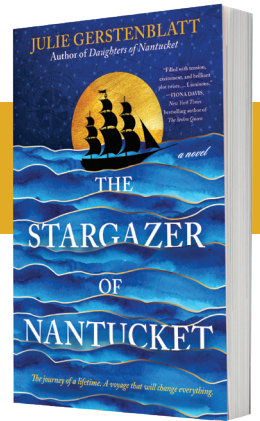
Sixteen months, which actually isn't that long for a historical novel. And it took less time than *Daughters*, which required two years. I think two factors shaved off some time. First, I was an empty-nester this time, which was a new experience. I wrote *Daughters* while the kids were in school, basically from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. from Monday to Friday. But with *Stargazer*, I could write whenever, which included weekends and late afternoons, with me roaming around my house in my pajamas and talking to the characters in my head endlessly, until my husband reminded me to shower or eat or put on real clothing.

Secondly, I was under contract for *Stargazer*, which I was not for *Daughters*. My editor bought *Stargazer* on the basis of the first hundred pages and an outline of the rest, which definitely put the wind in my sails and gave me a goal and a deadline.

If you'd like to learn more about my path to publication, please download the Book Club Guide to *Daughters of Nantucket*, which has its own author Q & A with topics that might be of interest to your book club.

Discussion Guide

Q&A WITH JULIE GERSTENBLATT

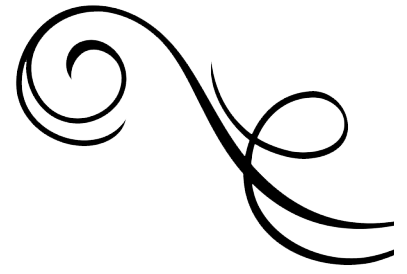
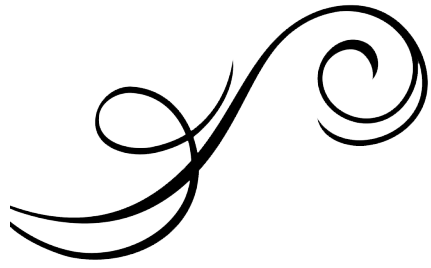


What's next? Is there a third book in the works?

Originally, I imagined a three-book historical series, but right now, I am working on a contemporary Nantucket novel set in both 1989 and now. (I know! I've gone rogue!)

During college, I spent the month of August in a haunted house on Union Street with my newly reconciled, previously separated parents, my best friend from college and my brother and his best friend, and I've always wanted to write about that time. I am interested in female friendships and first love and marriage and ownership over stories and places. I am both nostalgic for the way things were but also feel interested in probing midlife's challenges and joys. At the core, I am always going to be looking at Nantucket for inspiration, and I feel like Nantucket's more recent history and sense of place has a lot to offer that I haven't yet gotten to dig into as a writer.

So we shall see! Ask me in a year.

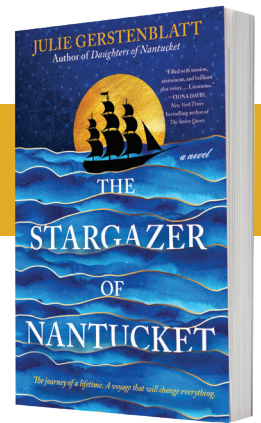


JULIE GERSTENBLATT

is the author of *Daughters of Nantucket*, which won the New England Society Book Award for Fiction. She holds a doctorate in curriculum and instruction from Teachers College, Columbia University. Her essays have appeared in *Huffington Post* and *Grown & Flown*, among others. A native New Yorker who has been visiting Nantucket since childhood, Julie now lives in coastal Rhode Island with her family and one very smart shichon poo.

Discussion Guide

PRAISE FOR THE NOVELS OF JULIE GERSTENBLATT



THE STARGAZER OF NANTUCKET

“Filled with tension, excitement, and brilliant plot twists, the story moves at a breakneck pace against the backdrop of Gerstenblatt’s meticulous research. Luminous.”

—**FIONA DAVIS**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Stolen Queen*

“Intimate and worldly, brilliant with love, loss, humor, and pirates, too.”

—**NANCY THAYER**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Summer Light on Nantucket*

“A sweeping story of love, fortune and how far we’ll travel to discover who we’re meant to be. An absolute delight!”

—**BROOKE LEA FOSTER**, author of *Our Last Vineyard Summer*

“A gorgeous sweeping novel of a mother’s fierce commitment to her daughter and her passion for the freedom of the sea.”

—**DAWN TRIPP**, nationally bestselling author of *Jackie*

“Authentic and impeccably researched, packed with colorful characters and a narrative that surprises you at every turn, until you land at last on a satisfying shore. This is masterful storytelling from a gifted writer.”

—**BEATRIZ WILLIAMS**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Husbands and Lovers*

DAUGHTERS OF NANTUCKET

“Gerstenblatt’s distinctive tale, a triumph in storytelling, celebrates the courage and tenacity of women.”

—**Booklist**, starred review

“A memorable story of friendship and courage.”

—**PAM JENOFF**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Lost Girls of Paris*

“A moving story of hope, loss, perseverance, and survival.”

—**CHRISTINA BAKER KLINE**, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Orphan Train* and *The Exiles*

“Artfully weaves in modern issues and challenges in this gorgeously written novel, leaving us wiser and more optimistic for our own times.”

—**NANCY THAYER**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Summer Love*

“Full of richly detailed history and also the spark and brilliance of Gerstenblatt’s imagination, this is a novel that’s so alive, every page gives off rare heat.”

—**CAROLINE LEAVITT**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *With or Without You*