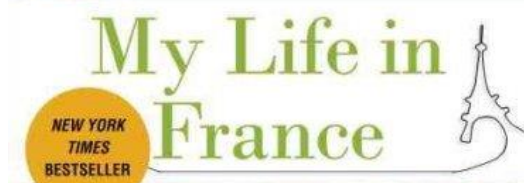


## Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1346503>

### About the Book



**Julia Child**  
*with Alex Prud'homme*

Julia Child single-handedly awakened America to the pleasures of *good* cooking with her cookbook *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* and her television show *The French Chef*, but as she reveals in this bestselling memoir, she didn't know the first thing about cooking when she landed in France.

Indeed, when she first arrived in 1948 with her husband, Paul, she spoke no French and knew nothing about the country itself. But as she dove into French culture, buying food at local markets and taking classes at the Cordon Bleu, her life changed forever. Julia's unforgettable story unfolds with the spirit so key to her success as a cook and teacher and writer, brilliantly capturing one of the most endearing American personalities of the last fifty years.

### About the Author



#### **Julia Child**

- Born —August 5, 1912, Pasadena, California
- Died —August 12, 2004, Santa Barbara, California
- Education—B.A., Smith College; Le Cordon Bleu
- Awards—Emmy Awards, 1965, 1996 and 1997; George Foster Peabody Award, 1965; Ordre de Mérite Agricole, 1967; Ordre de Mérite National, 1976; Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur, 2000

If leeks, shallots, and sea salt are available at your local supermarket, you probably have Julia Child to thank for it. At a time when many home cooks had nothing more ambitious in their repertoires than Jell-O salad, Child revolutionized the American kitchen, demonstrating that with good ingredients and a few French techniques, even the novice chef could turn out bistro-worthy dinners of *boeuf bourguignon* and *tarte Tatin*.

Child's interest in teaching techniques, rather than simply listing fancy recipes, was evident from her first cookbook, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, which took years of collaboration (with Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle) and experimentation to write. Craig Claiborne, reviewing the book for *The New York Times* in 1961, wrote: "Probably the most comprehensive, laudable, and monumental work on [French cuisine] was published this week, and it will probably remain the definitive work for nonprofessionals." He was right -- it's been a top seller ever since.

To promote the book, the Cordon Bleu-trained Child made an appearance on WGBH in Boston. Not content merely to talk about cooking, she brought along eggs, a hot plate, and a whisk, and demonstrated the proper way to make an omelette. The station producers recognized a potential star, and Child's first television show, *The French Chef*, was born. Soon thousands of viewers were tuning in to watch Julia flip crepes, blanch beans, and sear steaks. Each show ended with her signature sign-off: "Bon appétit!"

Since then, Child has hosted hundreds of television episodes, and her cookbooks have continued to be both inspiring and practical. Volume two of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* was followed by titles like *The Way to Cook*, *Cooking with Master Chefs* and *Julia's Kitchen Wisdom*. Child also co-founded the American Institute of Wine and Food, an educational organization devoted to gastronomy. Many top-flight professional and celebrity chefs -- including Alice Waters, Emeril Lagasse, and Thomas Keller -- have cited Julia Child as an inspiration. "My own copy of volume one [of *French Cooking*] is so worn that the duct tape holding it together looks natural," chef Jasper White once noted.

Still, Child remains best known for bringing good food into the home, where she championed "food as an art form, as a delightful part of civilized life." And though she's expanded her range to include American, Mediterranean, and Asian cuisines, she hasn't been influenced by fad diets or fat phobias. She still cooks with butter and cream. As she told *Nightline*, "Small helpings, no seconds, a little

bit of everything, no snacking and have a good time. I think if you follow that, you're going to be healthy, wealthy and wise."

During World War II, Julia McWilliams served in the Office of Strategic Services -- the forerunner of the CIA -- in Ceylon and China, where she met Paul Child. After the war, the two married and moved to Paris, where Julia Child fell in love with French food. Years later, she could still recount her first meal in Paris, which included oysters, scallops in cream sauce, and duck.

After Child moved from her Cambridge, Massachusetts, house to a retirement community in California, she donated her famous kitchen—where three of her television series were taped—to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

Child stood tall at a statuesque 6' 2".

## **Reviews**

### *New York Times*

The result is a delight. On one level, it's the story of how a "6-foot-2-inch, 36-year-old, rather loud and unserious Californian" — her words — discovered the fullness of life in France. On another, it recounts the making of "Julia Child," America's grande dame of French cooking. Inevitably, the stories overlap.

### *Publishers Weekly*

Famed chef Child, who died in 2004, recounts her life in France, beginning with her early days at the Cordon Bleu after WWII. Greenberg, an actress for radio and commercials, does a fine job capturing Child's joie de vivre and unmatched skill as a culinary animateur. We hear Child's delight and excitement when she discovers her calling as a writer and hands-on teacher of haute cuisine; her exasperation as yet another publishing house rejects her ever-growing monster of a manuscript; and her joy at its publication and acclaimed reception after more than a decade of work. Child's opinionated exuberance translates remarkably well to audio, from her initial Brahmin-like dismissal of the new medium of television (why would Americans want to waste a perfectly good evening staring into a box, she wondered?) and frustration at her diplomat husband being investigated in the McCarthy-driven 1950s to her ecstasy about roast chicken and mulish insistence on the one correct method to make French bread at home. The seamless abridgment has no jarring gaps or abrupt transitions to mar the listener's enjoyment. Potential listeners should beware, however: this is not a book to hear on an empty stomach.

### *Library Journal*

Lovingly cumulated from letters written by Child and her diplomat husband, Paul, as well as interviews with the author in her later years, *My Life in France* recounts the formative years of her development into a world-renowned chef. The book captures her unique voice in its elaborate descriptions of the sights and sounds of postwar France and its sumptuous and memorable meals. The title is deceptive, however; this recollection is much more than the story of Child's years in France and her time at Le Cordon Bleu culinary school. Much of this memoir is dedicated to the years that followed, her experiences as she moved about Europe and finally settled in Cambridge, MA. One significant episode is Child's work with Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle and their numerous failures and ultimate success at writing a French cookbook for an American audience, the critically acclaimed and classic *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*.

### *Booklist*

Knowing little about the country and less about its cooking, Child sailed to France with her new husband in 1948. Her first meal after debarking, a simple sauteed sole, opened to her (and to posterity) a new world. She began her French sojourn as the underemployed and ever-curious wife of a diplomatic officer, frustrated at being unable even to speak the language. Language classes led to cooking classes, then to partnering with Simone Beck and Louisette Bertholle in an American book contract. Child's devotees know the basics of this story, but the details reveal the gradual education of Child's palate, her anti-McCarthy politics, her intense love for her husband, and her boundless capacity for hard work. Although Child died before this memoir compiled from her papers reached completion, her grandnephew Prud'homme proves a worthy editor. In seamlessly flowing prose, the text follows Child's growth as a cook into one of the best and most influential teachers of the twentieth century. Like Child herself, this memoir is earnest but never pedantic. Her eye for the ironic, her sense of humor, and her sharp sensitivity to the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and colors that surround her make lucid, lively reading.

### *Kirkus Reviews*

"Ooh, those lovely roasted, buttery French chickens, they were so good and chickeny!" Anyone who remembers the iconic, deceased Julia Child (1912-2004)- or perhaps Dan Aykroyd's affectionate imitation of her-will recognize the singular voice. It's employed in this memoir to full advantage, and to the reader's great pleasure. As relative and writer Prud'homme recalls, at the end of her long life, Child was busily recording her years as a budding chef. In 1948, newly wed, she moved to Paris with her diplomat husband Paul, whom she had met while on wartime duty for the OSS (now there would be a story) in Asia. The first meal she

cooked for him, she recalls, was "a disaster," and she arrived in France "a six-foot-two-inch, thirty-six-year-old, rather loud and unserious Californian," but in every aspect of her life, she was determined to do better. With self-effacing humor, Child recalls her efforts at learning French, finding an apartment and coping with life in a different culture. No matter how embarrassing or baffling the course of her learning curve, Child's francophilia and zest for life shine through, and nowhere more than in the pages devoted to her sentimental education at the Cordon Bleu, the world-renowned culinary institute, in whose cramped basement she "learned how to glaze carrots and onions at the same time as roasting a pigeon, and how to use the concentrated vegetable juices to fortify the pigeon flavor, and vice versa," among other talents. Matching her growing skills with a formidable armada of kitchen gadgets that will make cookery-loving readers swoon, she then recounts the difficult conception and extremely difficult birth of her book *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, which brought her fame. Charming, idiosyncratic and much fun—just like its author, who is very much alive in these pages. A blessing for lovers of France, food and fine writing.

### **Discussion Questions** *Source: LitLovers Book Club Resources*

1. Julia Child was an exuberant personality. How does that exuberance reveal itself when she first moves to France with husband Paul, a country many Americans have found unwelcoming? Why was Julia's experience so different?
2. Talk about Julia's ability to overcome self-doubt and rejection as she pursues her career...both as chef and later as writer.
3. What role does Paul play in Julia's development? How would you describe the quality of their marriage?
4. Trace the process of how Julia comes to fall in love with French food—the fact that it was not just to be eaten but to be experienced. Talk about that first meal in France where she had her epiphany? Anything similar in your own life?
5. Discuss some of the interesting side stories: Julia's relationship with her father, McCarthyism and Paul's subsequent disillusionment with the U.S. government.
6. Consider, too, some of the ironic or humorous moments: language missteps or Julia's initial thoughts about TV.
7. How important was Julia Child's role in introducing America to French food and classical cooking? Has her influence lasted, given the culture's affection for (or addiction to) fast food and convenience cooking, as well as our emphasis on low-

fat diets?

8. If you have visited France (or live there), how do Julia's reminiscences compare to life in France today? What has changed ... and what has remained the same?

9. If you have cooked with any of Julia Child's cookbooks, especially her most famous, *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, what were your experiences with her recipes? Difficult? Easy? Delicious? Too rich? Which are your favorite recipes of hers? Do you, in fact, enjoy French cuisine?

## Multimedia

### ***Julia Child: An American, Forever In France* (Radio Broadcast)**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=111653075>

NPR's look at the life and work of Julia Child.

### ***Julie and Julia* (Movie)**

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1350129>

(Call number: DVD Drama Julie)

Julie Powell is a frustrated insurance worker who wants to be a writer. Trying to find a challenge in her life, she decides to cook her way through Julia Child's 'Mastering the Art of French Cooking' in one year, and to blog about it. As Julie begins to find her groove as a cook, and her voice as a writer, the project takes on a life of its own. The project provides the struggling young woman with her life's purpose, to her very pleasant surprise. Julia Child has an amazing love affair with her dashing husband, Paul, all while embracing life and French food. Julie lovingly celebrates the life on one of American food's most influential and beloved figureheads.

## Further Reading

***On Rue Tatin: Living and Cooking in a French Town*** by Susan Herrmann Loomis

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1179990>

(Call number: 641.5944 He)

A bestselling cookbook author and journalist tells the delicious story of her expatriate life, raising a family, renovating a convent, and savoring the culinary bounty of one of Normandy's most picturesque towns.

***Julie and Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously*** by Julie Powell

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1250573>

(Call number: 641.509)

*Julie & Julia*, the bestselling memoir that's "irresistible....A kind of Bridget Jones meets The French Chef" ( *Philadelphia Inquirer*), is now a major motion picture. Julie Powell, nearing thirty and trapped in a dead-end secretarial job, resolves to reclaim her life by cooking in the span of a single year, every one of the 524 recipes in Julia Child's legendary *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Her unexpected reward: not just a newfound respect for calves' livers and aspic, but a new life-lived with gusto.

### **Author website**

<http://www.pbs.org/juliachild/>

Homepage for Child from PBS.

### **Read-Alikes**

***Henri Cartier-Bresson scrapbook: photographs 1932-1946*** by Henri Cartier-Bresson

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1288303>

(Call number: 779.092 Ca)

Henri Cartier-Bresson was taken prisoner by the Germans in 1940. After two unsuccessful attempts, he managed to escape in 1943. During this period, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, assuming that the photographer had died in the war, started preparing what they thought would be a posthumous exhibition of his work. When he reappeared, Cartier-Bresson was delighted to learn of the exhibition and decided to review his entire oeuvre and curate it himself. In 1946 Cartier-Bresson traveled to New York with about 300 prints in his suitcase, bought a scrapbook, glued in the photos, and brought that album to MoMA's curators.

***It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time: My Adventures in Life and Food*** by Moira Hodgson

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1318916>

(Call number: 641.509 Ho)

Hodgson has earned a reputation as a discerning critic and entertaining writer. *It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time* reflects Hodgson's talent for connecting her love of food with the people and places in her life--from Vietnam to Chiapas, Mexico, from Berlin to Lapland there was always a new dish to taste, a new people to share her travels with. Like Ruth Reichl's bestselling memoirs, it is a glorious celebration of good food and good company.

*The Gastronomical Me* by M. F. K. Fisher

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1113733>

(Call number: 641.01 Fi)

In 1929, a newly married M.F.K. Fisher said goodbye to a milquetoast American culinary upbringing and sailed with her husband to Dijon, where she tasted real French cooking for the first time. *The Gastronomical Me* is a chronicle of her passionate embrace of a whole new way of eating, drinking, and celebrating the senses. As she recounts memorable meals shared with an assortment of eccentric and fascinating characters, set against a backdrop of mounting pre-war tensions, we witness the formation not only of her taste but of her character and her prodigious talent.

*The Art of Eating* by M. F. K. Fisher and Joan Reardon

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1217576>

(Call number: 641.013 Fi)

RUTH REICHL "Mary Frances [Fisher] has the extraordinary ability to make the ordinary seem rich and wonderful. Her dignity comes from her absolute insistence on appreciating life as it comes to her." JULIA CHILD "How wonderful to have here in my hands the essence of M.F.K. Fisher, whose wit and fulsome opinions on food and those who produce it, comment upon it, and consume it are as apt today as they were several decades ago, when she composed them. Why did she choose food and hunger she was asked, and she replied, 'When I write about hunger, I am really writing about love and the hunger for it, and warmth, and the love of it . . . and then the warmth and richness and fine reality of hunger satisfied.' This is the stuff we need to hear, and to hear again and again." ALICE WATERS "This comprehensive volume should be required reading for every cook. It defines in a sensual and beautiful way the vital relationship between food and culture."

*Summaries from AADL.org Catalog*

## **Extra!**

As a group, choose one of Julia's recipes and try to bring it to life!

