

Reading Guide Questions for Conversations with a Fat Girl

1. Henry James was quoted as saying that one of the most difficult decisions about The Portrait of a Lady was deciding if the title should be A Portrait of the Lady or The Portrait of a Lady. Why do you think this author chose to call the novel Conversations with the Fat Girl as opposed to Conversations with a Fat Girl?
2. Discuss the dissonance between how Maggie sees herself physically as opposed to how she actually looks. Do you think that we all see ourselves through a distorted filter? Do you think this is solely an issue among women? Why do you think this filter exists and where do you think it comes from?
3. Why do you think Olivia asks Maggie to be her Maid of Honor? Do you think it is an act of hope, revenge or something else?
4. Discuss Maggie's relationship with her mother. Do you think because she is the baby of the family her development has been arrested – or do you think there are other factors at work? How do you think Maggie is similar to her mother? How are they different?
5. Despite Maggie's attempts to quell her sexuality, the tension between Domenic and her is palpable – why does she not act on it? At what point did you think Domenic had feelings for her? Why does Maggie never pick up on it? Why isn't Domenic more aggressive?
6. Do you think there is one character that represents the reader more than the others? Is there one character that you waited for to enter the scene knowing that they would speak for you and shake some sense into Maggie when she needed it?
7. Think about your own adolescent fantasies – do you think they are still embedded in your head today? Knowing now what you know about reality – do you still yearn to bump into the starting quarterback or head cheerleader and show them how well you turned out? How do you think Olivia twisted these fantasies and do you think her life now mirrors them? Why doesn't Maggie fit in with Olivia's new life?
8. What do you think Peregrine's role is in Maggie's life? Do you feel everyone has a Peregrine in his or her life? What do you think fuels Peregrine to be the center of attention in everyone's social calendar?

9. What do you think the Head Table represents to Olivia? To Maggie?
10. Kate and Maggie are opposites. Why did they turn out so differently and do you think this is commonplace among sisters? Do you think Kate is a positive force on Maggie or does she keep Maggie in that 'baby-of-the-family' role? What is it about the Bridal Shower she sends Kate over the edge?
11. Peregrine asks Maggie if she would choose Christina over herself – if given the opportunity - to be Fatty or Bobo. What would you do? Why do you think we as a society put so much importance on physical beauty? And accordingly, those who are overweight, especially women, are ostracized as untouchables. Does society banish the overweight – or, like Maggie, it is the overweight that banish themselves?
12. We learn that Olivia was a confident, quirky, independent child – why do you think she felt this wasn't good enough? Do you think her parents' social status aided in her quest for perfection? Or was Paulette's constant enabling a recipe for disaster?
13. Why was that night on the Golden Gate Bridge such an epiphany for Olivia?
14. There is a tragic quality to Cole Trosclair – do you think that makes him a sympathetic character or is he so despicable that no amount of melancholy would sway your feelings for him? Do you think as a society we spend too much time trying to save the bullies and not enough time protecting the victims? Why do you think Maggie cares so much what he thinks?
15. What is the role of fathers in this novel - from Hobbs Morten to Russell to Vincent to the mention of Maggie's real father? We never hear of Domenic's father, yet we meet his grandmother. We never hear of Peregrine's father – yet we know that she moved out west because of her mother. Why do you think this is important?
16. With years of education and obvious talent on her side, why do you think Maggie still works at Joe's after so many years? Do you think this concept of "it's just easier" could be a thematic thread throughout the entire novel? Do you see this concept in your own life?
17. If Maggie is so self-conscious about her body – why was she so open to having sex with Mason Phelps? Do you think that what is so scary about Domenic is that she will have to connect body and mind? How does Sam the Masseur work into this equation?
18. What is Gwen's role in Olivia's life? What do all of Olivia's new friends represent – and concurrently how does this 'New Guard' affect Maggie's role in Olivia's life?
19. What do you think of the passage in the Bridal Shop regarding the 'sub-culture' that surrounds the overweight? Do you think it is accurately represented – or has your experience been different? Why do you think women compare themselves in this way?

How would you react in Olivia's circumstance – would you extract yourself from that world as she did – or would you wear the weight loss as a badge of honor?

20. What do you think Solo represents? What drew Maggie to such a wild, free spirited animal? Why is it so important that she be trained? What if she can't be trained – what if they fail? Where will that leave Maggie?
21. Why do you think Maggie invites Domenic to her family birthday party? What message is Maggie sending to her family – and do they get it? Why do you think Domenic pulls away from Maggie after she thanks him with a hug for his thoughtful gift?
22. Do you think Maggie goes overboard in her revenge? Do you think Maggie honestly thought it would be okay to add her pictures to the slide show – or did she know this would infuriate Olivia? Does it matter? Was it important that we saw Olivia's Mom's positive reaction to the slide show as Maggie's leaving?
23. If you could write the next chapter what would you write? Would it be more important to focus on Maggie's happiness or Olivia's misery in your version?