

Skaneateles Library
Books by the Stack
Discussion Questions

Manhattan Beach
by Jennifer Egan

1. In the first chapter, on the beach, Anna walks barefoot despite the cold and says, "It only hurts at first. After a while you can't feel anything." How does this set the tone for the rest of the novel?

2. Ed, looking back on his decision to work with Dexter, reflects that he needed a change, that he would "take danger over sorrow any day of the week." Is Ed right to do this? Is Ed's philosophy a noble or a selfish one?

3. What draws Anna to Nell? And Nell to Anna? How are they not "angels" and how does this bond them?

4. Even at a young age, Dexter wants to know what's beneath the surface of things. "For him, the existence of an obscure truth recessed behind an obvious one, and emanating through it allegorically, was mesmerizing." How does this fascination shape Dexter's life and his career?

5. Why does Anna set herself such a difficult task — becoming a diver, "breaking" the lieutenant, facing opposition at every turn? Why does she feel that she always wanted an enemy?

6. Why does Lydia's death solidify Agnes's determination to be done with her husband, after so many years, whether he returns or not?

7. Why does Dexter insist on diving with Anna to try to find her father's corpse? What does this effort represent for him? What do you think he comes to understand?

8. Luck plays an important role throughout the novel and has particular significance for Anna, Dexter, and Ed. How does luck shape each of their lives? Good luck and bad luck?

9. Throughout the novel, characters create new identities for themselves and start over. How do these individual stories of reinvention relate to the spirit of optimism, the quest for the new that is so common among Americans at this time?

10. Would you recommend others read this book?

