

## Author Spotlight

# MEG WOLITZER



Meg Wolitzer is the *New York Times* bestselling author of ten novels including *The Female Persuasion* (2018), *The Interestings* (2013), *The Uncoupling* (2010), and *The Wife* (2003). Wolitzer was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York by novelist Hilma Wolitzer and psychologist Morton Wolitzer. She was encouraged by her mother to become whatever she wanted in life and began writing in grade school. Wolitzer studied creative writing at Smith College and graduated from Brown University in 1981. Three of her novels have been adapted into film: *This Is Your Life* (film title is *This Is My Life*, 1992), *Surrender, Dorothy* (2006) and *The Wife* (2017). She currently teaches in the MFA program at Stony Brook Southampton and lives in New York City.

In *The Interestings*, it is the summer of 1974. Six teenagers—Ash, Goodman, Ethan, Jonah, Cathy and Julie—become inseparable at a summer camp for the arts and have nicknamed themselves the “interestings.” Decades later the bonds remain powerful, yet so much has changed. Wolitzer follows the characters from the height of youth through middle age, as their talents, fortunes, and degrees of satisfaction diverge.

Wolitzer’s inspiration for *The Interestings* came from her own experience at summer camp in 1974. Writing the book allowed her to return to some of the feelings and sensations of that long-ago summer. In an interview with the *Nashville Review* in July 2017, Wolitzer discussed the importance of writing about friendship. “I love writing about friends. They are essential, they fortify, they disappoint, they hover; there are many ways to look at friendship. It’s a subject that I find pretty durable, and I imagine that will always be true for me.”

Wide in scope, ambitious, and populated by complex characters who come together and drift apart in a changing New York City, *The Interestings* explores the meaning of talent; the nature of envy; the roles of class, art, money, and power; and how all of it can shift and tilt precipitously over the course of a friendship and a life.

Prepared by Maureen Socha  
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## Discussion Questions for *The Interestings*

1. Think about how talent is presented in the book. In your opinion, is it something you are born with or something you work hard to achieve? What is Meg Wolitzer saying about early talent? How is it important to future success? What roles do money and class play in fostering talent? Think about Jules and Ash. How does money influence the trajectories of their lives?
2. Jealousy is referred to in the book as being “I want what you have,” whereas envy is “I want what you have, but I also want to take it away so you can’t have it.” Who is jealous in this book? Who is envious? Can jealousy become envy? How is envy tied up in issues like talent and money?
3. Single parents, lost parents, and absent parents play a role in this novel. In what ways do the families the characters were born into shape their futures? Ash and Goodman are the only characters to come from an intact nuclear family that is able to provide for all their needs. Do you think it is necessarily a good thing for Goodman? What about Ash?
4. Despite the well-quoted sentiment that “you can’t go home again,” Jules tries to return to the place that felt like her spiritual, emotional, and artistic home. Are there circumstances in life in which you *can* go home again successfully? Is Jules foolish to give up her current life for something much more uncertain? What positive changes does the experience bring?
5. Despite how much she wants to, Jules cannot make herself fall in love with Ethan. Do you wish she were able to? Do you think Jules wishes she could? What about Ethan?
6. Ethan is one of the most noble characters in the book, and yet he has trouble reconciling his son’s condition and lies to Ash to avoid going to Mo’s evaluation. How does Ethan’s ambivalence about Mo change the way you feel about him? How do you feel about Jules’s complicity in the deception?
7. The shift from the 70s to the 80s to the current moment is an important one depicted in the book. What do you think Meg Wolitzer is trying to say about art and how art is sold? How does the commoditization of art change the role of the artist? Was the art of the 70s as pure as it seemed to the creators? The Wunderlichs remain true to an even earlier version of what art should be. What are the positives of that vision? What are its limits?
8. What role does geography play in the book? Think about the different spaces and homes represented: Manhattan, Underhill, Spirit-in-the-Woods. What do they say about the people who live in them? Think about Jules’s own feelings about her mother’s home in Underhill compared with the Wolfs’ home in Manhattan. What do these two spaces mean to her?