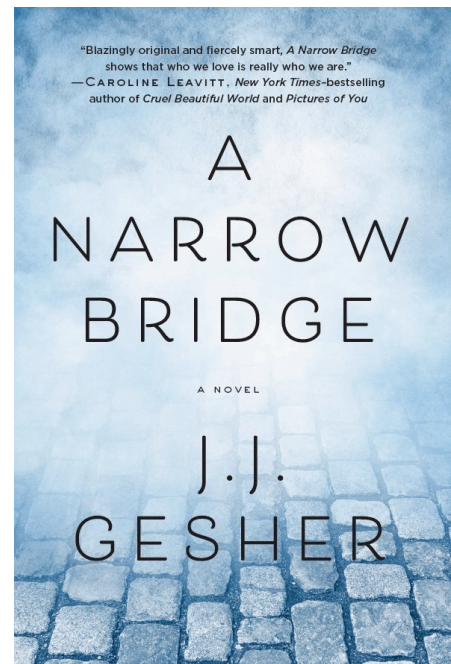


# Reading Group Guide **A Narrow Bridge**

By **J.J. Geshner**

## 15 Conversation Starters

1. The title of this novel comes from the verse, “The whole world is a narrow bridge and we must not be afraid.” Is this novel an account of Jacob’s journey after he falls from the metaphorical bridge? What other characters have also fallen, or are going through dark phases in their lives? Who recovers their footing?
2. After the death of his family, Jacob shaves off his beard, boards a train, and travels as an unknown man with no past, no family, and no religion. He seems to ignore the customs of Orthodox Judaism, but does not seem to lose the ability to be spiritual. In what ways has Jacob gained a more spiritual understanding of life by leaving his Orthodox practices? What would have happened if Jacob stayed in Brooklyn and mourned as traditional dictated?
3. In what ways are Brooklyn and Brent similar? In what ways are they different?
4. Rosie, like Jacob, was raised by pious parents and raises her son, Langston, in an authoritative household. How is Rosie and Langston’s family dynamic different from the Fisher family dynamic? How did Rosie and Jacob’s upbringings influence their decisions and interactions as adults?
5. Jacob was sent away to Israel to undergo rehabilitation for his drug addiction and returned to Brooklyn as a new man intensely devoted to Orthodox practices. Is Brent another place of rehabilitation for Jacob? Why, in the end, did he still feel the pull to Brent even though he moved to San Francisco?
6. The church is at the center of Mo’s, Rosie’s, and Jacob’s life in Brent. Mo lived in the basement after the Vietnam War. He was adrift and questioning his belief in God after seeing his friends die during the war. Now Jacob is questioning his faith after witnessing horrific death and destruction. How is the church a different kind of space for Rosie and Langston? What kinds of different roles does the church play in the characters’ lives?
7. This novel brings up many questions about the connection between children and parents. Jacob’s father misunderstood him and made no attempt to understand his son’s reasoning. Hava loves her children unconditionally, but can it really be said that she understood Jacob after she succeeds in bringing him back to Brooklyn? Can a parent ever really know his or her child?



8. Sports are important to Jacob. Basketball also allows Jacob and Langston to bond, and Rosie to take notice of Jacob's parental side. Do sports play an important role in your life? In your childhood? What is it about sports that helped Jacob recover from drug abuse and the loss of his family?
9. How does the relationship between Edmond and his mother mirror the relationship between Jacob and Hava, or Hansom and his grandmother?
10. Rosie and Jacob are both emboldened and restricted by the social customs of their religious and social communities. How did the Orthodox Jewish community and the Baptist community give Rosie and Jacob strength? How did these communities make them suffer?
11. Rosie directs her World Literature students to list instances in literature in which the biggest obstacle for characters are found within. Rosie names this topic Man vs. Self. Which characters have more internal than external conflict? Jacob, Hava, and even Richard struggle with accepting their circumstances— how much of their anguish is due to their surroundings? How much of it is due to their own internal battles?
12. At the end of *A Narrow Bridge*, Rosie has returned to her life in Brent, while Jacob, after first returning to his religious practices and his home in Brooklyn, moves to San Francisco. Yet he still dreams of Rosie and Brent. Should he have gone back to Brent to try to start a new life, or is a fresh start in a new city the right choice?
13. The first page of *A Narrow Bridge* foreshadows much of the novel and Jacob's character. His inherent curiosity introduces him to Lenny, jazz, blues, and a hint of the South, but it also introduces him to heroin. The innocent pursuit of learning music also led him away from his religious life and toward the path of addiction. Where might the dangers lurk in his new life? The rewards?
14. Rosie and Jacob are shockingly similar. They are both teachers and members of a religious choir, they find solace in music, and are both dealing with an identity crisis. How are they different, and do these differences keep them apart?
15. Do faith and religious practices stifle the characters or allow them to lead more full lives?

## Praise for *A Narrow Bridge*

“What happens when you lose everything? This radiant debut gets at the dark beating heart of survival, set against a backdrop of differing geography, beliefs, cultures, and races, in prose as intricate as a jazz fugue. Blazingly original and fiercely smart, *A Narrow Bridge* shows that who we love is really who we are.”

— **Caroline Leavitt**, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *Is This Tomorrow* and *Pictures of You*

“*A Narrow Bridge* is a moving story about the intersection between love and loss and an unsentimental exploration of the role of faith in healing. I held my breath until the very last word of this cinematic, compassionate, and compelling debut.”

— **Michelle Brafman**, author of *Bertrand Court* and *Washing the Dead*

“A gripping, heartbreaking, ultimately uplifting story of two broken people and the healing power of love. Beautifully drawn, the writing keeps you riveted page after fast-turning page.”

— **Jeffrey Richman**, six-time Emmy-winning executive producer of *Modern Family* and *Frasier*

“A beautifully written, imaginative, and poignant testimony to the power of love and the limits of faith.”

— **Steven Z. Leder**, senior rabbi at Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles and author of *The Extraordinary Nature of Ordinary Things*

### Available at:

[Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

[BarnesandNoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com)

[IndieBound.org](https://www.indiebound.org)

[Vromans.com](https://www.vromans.com)



Prospect Park Books

[www.prospectparkbooks.com](https://www.prospectparkbooks.com) | [jjgesher.com](https://www.jjgesher.com)

PROSPECT  
· PARK ·  
BOOKS