

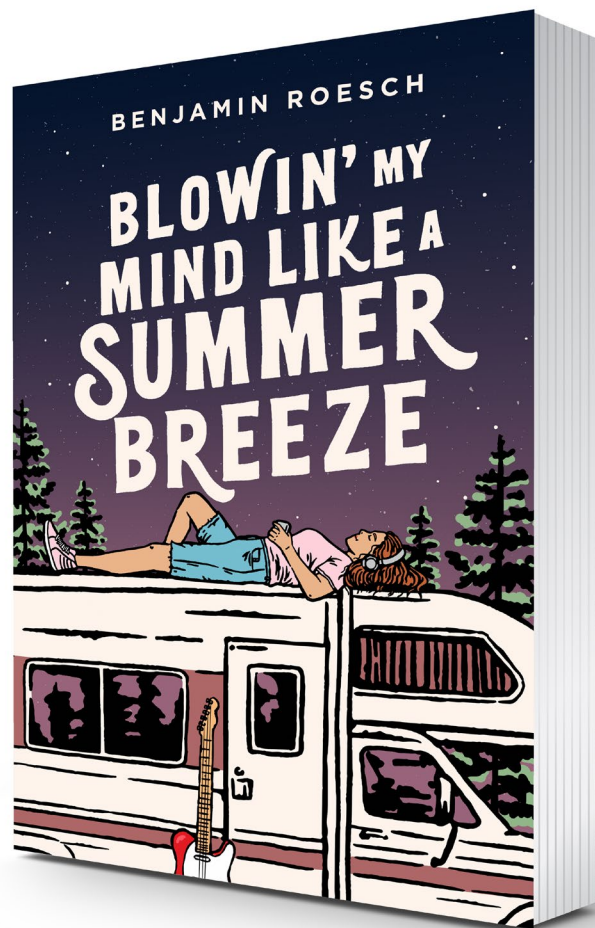
BLOWIN' MY MIND LIKE A SUMMER BREEZE

BY
BENJAMIN ROESCH

FIFTEEN YEAR OLD RAINEY COBB

never thought meeting someone could actually change her life. But, then again, she's never met anyone like Juliet.

It's 1995 and The Cobb Family Band, led by Rainey's rock star parents, has arrived for a week long gig at the Midwestern resort owned by Juliet's family. Dazzled by Juliet's carpe diem attitude, DIY tattoos, and passion for grunge, Rainey falls hard. And when Juliet gives Rainey



a mixtape that unlocks her heart's secret yearnings, Rainey starts seeing herself—and her vagabond, show-biz life—through new eyes.

If Rainey quits the band, her parents' fading career might never recover. But if she doesn't leap now, she might be stuck forever in a life she didn't choose... and always wonder who she could have been.

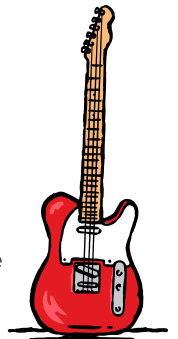


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BENJAMIN ROESCH has an MFA from Lesley University and is a writer, musician, teacher, podcaster, and award-winning essayist. For twelve glorious, exhausting years, he was a high school English teacher, and is now a full-time writer based in Burlington, VT, where he lives with his family. Oh, and his name is pronounced "Rush," like the band from Canada.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Rainey tries to become more truly “herself” by breaking free from the life her parents created for her. Is it necessary to reject our past in order to create our future?
2. This novel takes place in 1995, before cell phones and the Internet. How is being a teen today different from Rainey’s experiences? What aspects of Rainey’s story would be different if the book was set today instead of in 1995? What would be the same?
3. Do you need other people to feel happy? Or is it possible to find contentment alone?
4. At the end of Side One, Track Two, Rainey says “I’m waiting for something. I just wish I knew what it was.” What do you think Rainey is waiting for? Does she ever find it?
5. Rainey and Juliet become pen pals, hand writing letters back and forth. Nowadays, of course, they would likely be texting. How does instant communication affect the way we talk to each other, and the relationships we build, in both good and bad ways?
6. Juliet says that “Lithium,” by Nirvana is the song she would “take to the moon” because she loves it so much. What song(s) would you “take to the moon?”
7. What do you think about the “family band” dynamic in this book? About the pressure that being in the band places on Rainey and Walden? What feels fair or unfair about it?
8. Rainey wonders whether or not she’s gay, and if it’s important that she know for sure. How does this important question affect her life and relationships?
9. How do you feel about Rainey’s mom, Tracy, as a character? Do you empathize with her and feel connected to her struggles? Why or why not?
10. Luce Cobb battles what his family calls “stage fright,” but is really a form of anxiety and depression. Discuss the depiction of mental health in the book.
11. Analyze key settings from the book (Juliet’s bedroom, the treehouse, the RV, Green Valley High School) and explore the role that each setting plays in Rainey’s life.
12. There are many moments where Rainey wishes she had someone she could talk to and confide in about her problems. What’s one piece of advice you would give to Rainey?
13. When Rainey joins Evan’s band, it’s difficult for the boys in the band to understand Rainey, and they’re obviously intimidated by her musical talent. Analyze the gender dynamics in these scenes. Do they feel true to you? To your life? To modern life?
14. In the age of Spotify and playlists, the labor of love that is a good mixtape is a lost art. How are mixtapes and playlists different? Are you Team Mixtape or Team Playlist?
15. What do you think is next for Rainey when the book ends? Do you think she’ll continue with school? Will she keep pursuing music? Where will Rainey be five years from now?



ESSAY PROMPTS

- A. TOWARD THE END OF THE NOVEL**, Rainey says, “For the first time in as long as I can remember, the present feels pretty good, and I’m not too worried about the future.” There’s no doubt Rainey has changed throughout the book, but how much and in what ways? Using evidence from the text to support your argument, analyze how Rainey changes, or does not change, over the course of the book as a result of her choices, relationships, and experiences.
- B. FEAR PLAYS A POWERFUL ROLE** in all of our lives, and the Cobb Family is no different. In many ways, *Blowin’ My Mind Like a Summer Breeze* is a novel where all the members of the Cobb family have to confront their deepest fears. Using evidence from the text to support your argument, analyze the role that fear plays in this story, especially for Rainey, and her parents, Luce and Tracy. What fears do they experience? How do these fears affect their lives? In what ways do these characters overcome, or not overcome, their fears, and what are the results?
- C. MEETING JULIET IS A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE** for Rainey, which causes her to re-examine many things about herself, her family, and her life. And yet, her relationship with Juliet causes Rainey both joy and pain. Using evidence from the text to support your argument, do a deep dive into this pivotal relationship at the center of *Blowin’ My Mind Like a Summer Breeze*. Why does Juliet have such a powerful effect on Rainey? How does Rainey change as a result? What does this relationship end up teaching Rainey about life, love, and the person she wants to be?
- D. IN MANY WAYS, THIS NOVEL IS ABOUT RAINEY’S GROWTH** as a young artist, and creativity plays a huge role in the book. Using evidence from the text to support your argument, explore Rainey’s creative evolution over the course of the book. How does she grow as an artist, and what are the forces that empower her growth? Additionally, how is her artistic journey affected by being a young, female artist? And where has Rainey arrived as a creative person by the book’s end?
- E. RAINEY COBB IS A MUSICAL PRODIGY**, has a photographic memory, and “sings like a diva from another century.” And yet, in the novel, Rainey’s talent is a confusing burden as much as it is a gift. While it produces moments of awe in those around her, it also has the effect of making Rainey feel alone and isolated. Using evidence from the text to support your argument, examine the role that “talent” or being “gifted” plays in Rainey’s life and relationships. How does it both help and hurt her? Both ease and complicate her journey?

