

Book Talk

Tristan is fifteen years old and his voice hasn't changed. He is still overweight, and the kids at school are calling him names such as Dough Boy. For the first time he realizes that the social structure at school consists of the "cool" and the "uncool." Tristan, of course, is "uncool." Until now he has managed to hide behind Marco, his best friend, who is handsome and popular. But puberty has changed his friendship with Marco. Then things at home change. Tristan really gets along with Frank, his mother's boyfriend who lives with them; but when Kelly, Frank's daughter, moves in, Tristan's problems worsen. Kelly is thin, gorgeous, and obsessed with the subject of nutrition. She is disgusted by the food she finds in Frank's kitchen, and torments Tristan about his weight. How does Tristan eventually escape Kelly's wrath? What happens to the bullies at school? Does Tristan face more changes with friends and family, or does he learn how to take control of his own fate?

Prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

About the Author

PETER MARINO is an English professor and playwright whose first play has been produced in festivals around the country. He lives with his spouse, G. A. Broadwell, and their two "children," Ofi and Scratchbat (a dog and a bat, but not just any old dog and bat) in New York state. *Dough Boy* is Peter's first novel.



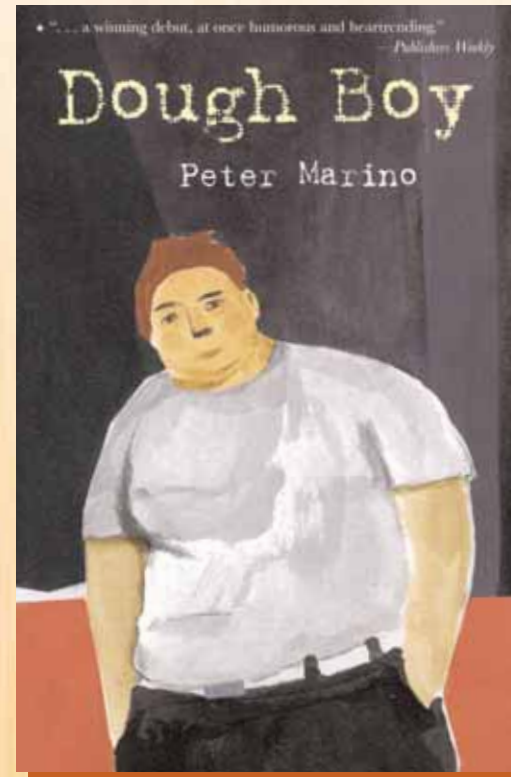
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Chatting it up

A Holiday House Discussion Guide



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Dough Boy Peter Marino

Overweight fifteen-year-old Tristan lives happily with his divorced mother and her boyfriend Frank. Then suddenly Tristan finds that he must deal with intensified criticism about his weight and other aspects of his life when Frank's popular but troubled, nutrition-obsessed daughter, Kelly, moves in.

Chatting it up

Thought-Provoking Questions for Discussion

- Describe the friendship between Tristan and his best friend, Marco. Who gains the most from the friendship? How does puberty change their relationship? Explain what Tristan means when he says that hanging around Marco gives him “recognition.” At what point in the novel does Tristan begin to realize that his friendship with Marco will never be the same again? Explain what Tristan means when he says, “There was something soothing about the realization, something calming about accepting the truth rather than trying to change it.” (p. 119)
- Tristan makes reference to the fact that he hasn’t physically matured like other boys in his class. How does this contribute to his social immaturity? Tristan eats lunch with Peter, Anthony, and Gretchen, friends from the band. Why is he so surprised when Anthony and Gretchen start dating?
- Will Zumigata has tormented Tristan since sixth grade. Why is Tristan such a target for bullies such as Will? Describe Tristan’s feelings when he is called Dough Boy. Discuss how Tristan handles the name-calling. Why doesn’t he want to tell the principal or his parents how the kids at school are treating him? Bullies such as Will are often insecure. How does bullying give them a false sense of security? Discuss ways to deal with bullies at school and in the neighborhood.
- Tristan is especially humiliated when Will trips him in the school cafeteria and causes him to spill his lunch tray. Why does this incident cause Tristan to feel like a “failure”? Explain why he suddenly feels exposed. How is Tristan ready to deal with the bullies by the end of the novel?

- Why do Marco’s and Kelly’s defiance intrigue Tristan? Explain what Tristan means when he says, “I had given her [Kelly] royalty status without even thinking.” (p. 218)
- For the most part, Tristan has a healthy attitude toward his parents’ divorce. Describe his relationship with each parent. How does he have a better sense of family than Marco, or Kelly? Cite evidence from the novel that Kelly isn’t cool with her parents’ divorce. How does she manipulate her father? Tristan really likes Frank, and his mother seems happy and less stressed than when she was married to Tristan’s father. Explain how Kelly changes their lives when she moves in.
- Discuss the theme of betrayal. Name the betrayed and the betrayers. Whom does Tristan betray? How does Tristan’s understanding of betrayal change by the end of the novel?
- Communication is an underlying theme in the novel. Contrast the way Tristan’s parents and Marco’s parents communicate with their sons. Marco’s parents use money and power to defend their son. How are they the root of his problems? Discuss whether Kelly’s defiance is a result of the lack of communication between her parents or something else. Why is it important for teenagers to have an open line of communication with their parents?
- Discuss how the author uses humor to give readers a break from the heart-wrenching realities of Tristan’s harrowing sophomore year.

“Fairness comes in small lumps. Unfairness comes in barrels. It only took Kelly one week at my school to become the center of attention. She and Marco were like royalty. I’d been at Green Hills since forever and hardly anyone knew my name.”

—from *Dough Boy*