

Reading Group Guide
***The Beautiful No*, by Sheri Salata**

1. Salata states that she “was a born producer.” What does she mean by this? What particular skills, temperaments, or qualities might this include? In what ways were these expressed long before her tenure at The Oprah Winfrey Show?
2. The Oprah Winfrey Show became so successful in part because its producers knew that “people’s stories mattered.” Why do stories matter? What’s the difference between gossip about a person and telling his or her story?
3. Why are “the most crucial stories...the ones we author for...ourselves”? How do personal narratives begin? How might we be sure that “what we say *to* ourselves *about* ourselves” is healthy and accurate?
4. Why might it be that so many people “talk to...pets or a stranger’s baby...with so much more love than [they] have ever spoken to [themselves]”? How does one go about changing this internal voice, these “well-worn grooves” of critical thoughts to combine honesty with tenderness?
5. Considering the advertising industry and American culture at large regarding beliefs about people her age, Salata claims that “all around us, the message is the same: you’re done.” How and where is this message articulated? What might explain such a dismissive bias against age despite the experience, wisdom, and perspective that can come with it?
6. Not until her mid-50s does Salata finally ask herself: “What about the life I always wanted?” Why might she have waited so long? What personal, social, or cultural forces might prevent people from following their dreams?
7. How does Salata define “the process of reinventing yourself and re-envisioning your life”? In what ways does this process require “not only courage but a deep sense of compassion”?
8. What’s the relationship between Salata’s physical self and how she thinks and feels about it? What are the many influences on how a person develops a body image? How does having a negative body image harm a person before, during, and even after reclaiming physical health?
9. How is it that a “seed was planted” in Salata’s mind in the fourth grade when her doctor warned her mother that she was “going to have to watch her weight”? What are healthy messages for girls and boys about body image and physical health?
10. Why, during her years of curating and listening to “some of the most leading-edge personal-development conversations ever” and meeting “some of the most prolific thought leaders and spiritual teachers on the planet,” was Salata unable to apply much of their wisdom to her own life? Why was so much of her life at this inspirational and supportive time unhealthy and “unlived” even though she “had all the information”?
11. What does Salata mean that, “letting go” is “the secret to renewal”? What kinds of thoughts, habits, and relationships did she have to let go of? How does one determine what to let go of? Why can severing such attachments be so difficult?
12. In what ways is Nancy Hala a great “sister friend” for Salata? How is her “middle-of-life reckoning” similar to or different from Salata’s? What is “intentional friendship”?
13. What are the benefits to working with other people to accomplish personal health goals? What might be some challenges? What transforms a group of friends or supporters into a “tribe”?
14. What is an “original beauty story”? What are various possible sources for such a profound and influential narrative? How was Salata’s beauty story “seriously flawed”? How might one go about redefining a flawed story as a healthy, affirmative one?

15. Regarding beauty and personal health in general, what does it mean to write a “whole new narrative”? Why might it require “an entirely new language,” and “choosing each word carefully”?
16. In pursuing personal change and evolution, what’s the relationship between the past and the present, the “then” and the “now”? Why does the past often have the power to determine how we feel about ourselves even if we’re behaving in new ways?
17. What’s the difference between moving in the direction of happiness and joy and simply moving “away from awfulness”? When is one more appropriate than the other?
18. Before working at The Oprah Winfrey Show, Salata began to feel that she “wanted meaning.” What might this have meant? What part does meaningfulness play in happiness?
19. What, specifically, was Salata’s “beautiful no”? More generally, how is the idea of such an experience “a big gorgeous gift”?
20. When determining what’s of value, what matters most, what’s the potential significance of seeing it as “a dance of flow, not a pie chart or a mathematical equation”?
21. Despite the profound need and help of friends, tribe, experts, mentors, etc., what does Salata mean that, “we must save ourselves”?
22. What’s the danger of holding “a superficial belief that love is like a magical zap”? Why has such an unhelpful story been so often told and retold? What’s a more accurate way to think about how loving relationships form and last?
23. Thinking of the marriage of Nate and Jeremiah, what does it mean to “live authentically”?
24. What does Salata mean that, “*everything* is energy”? How might one work to sense, harness, and determine such energy?
25. Why is meditation in general and Transcendental Meditation in particular so fundamentally important to Salata? What are the simple basics of any meditation practice?
26. What was the “brutal lesson” learned by way of the death of both John and Salata’s mother? What does it mean that she and her mother had “stayed in the day”?
27. What is the “mystical tapestry of it all”?
28. What does Salata mean when she says, “the formula for a happy life is choosing happiness”? In what ways is this task more complex and challenging than it sounds?
29. Where in your life might you be ready to “craft a new narrative”?