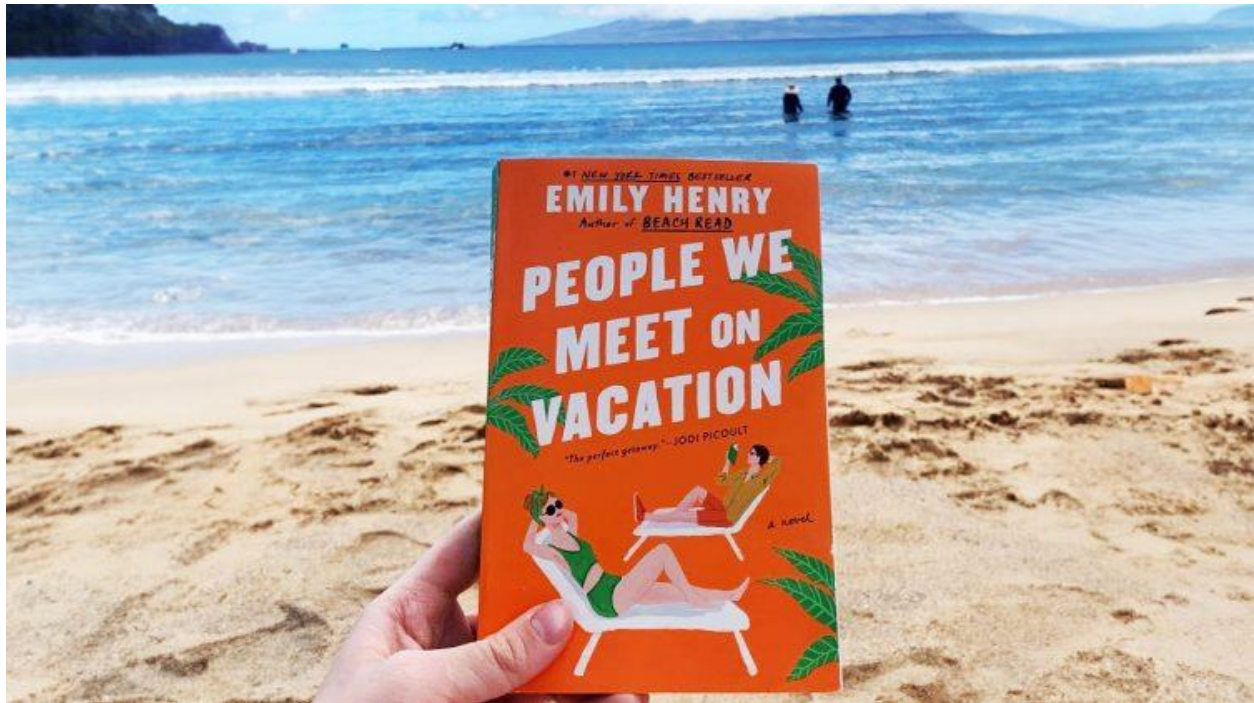




Sidnee Short holds her copy of "People We Meet on Vacation" in Maui. (Sidnee Short)

Short: Don't read this in public

June 28, 2024 by Sidnee Short

To read or not to read? What a stupid question. But, to read or not to read in public? A valid qualm.

I was reading “Happy Place” by Emily Henry at Barnes & Noble in Peabody the other day when the words on the page started to get fuzzy due to the haze of tears welling up in the sockets of my eyes.

“Oh my gosh, this is so embarrassing,” I thought to myself as an aesthetically alternative teenage couple walked by, headed to the manga section.

What was truly embarrassing was that I wasn't crying due to the nature of the book, but because I was on the last few pages. I was enjoying it so much that I wasn't looking forward to the end. I'd never be able to read it again for the first time. How dramatic is that?



Sidnee Short hides from the sun as she reads beneath the high UV rays in Hawaii.

I get disgustingly over-emotional when I read books or watch movies, so it's hard for me, as a self-described stoic, to do so in a public setting. Yet, I subject myself to possible public embarrassment all the time.

I cried so hard at the end of “The Iron Claw” in theaters that I waited until everyone else left so they didn't see the damage the movie had done. I saw it again in theaters two days later. I sat in the very back row and cried so hard the whole way through because I knew what was coming.

So, I'm curious if anyone else feels or does the same.

I asked my older sister, who reads romance and self-help only, her thoughts on reading in public. As someone who's not as contained by

the shackles of social anxiety, she said it doesn't really affect her. She even said that it gives her an (unwarranted) ego boost.

“When I read in public, I feel like I'm better than everyone else,” Saidee said, and then in a sing-song voice, “I'm giving smart-girl vibes, literate-girl vibes.”

Like I said, she strictly reads romance, and is currently pulled down into the black hole of the “A Court of Thorns and Roses” series by Sarah J. Maas, which has taken the romance- and fantasy-book girls of the internet by storm.

I was going to ask another gender — boys, if you will — their thoughts on the matter. But I stopped myself, as I couldn't recall any that actually know how to read.

So, if you're a boy reading this, good job! Keep going! You can do it!

Anyways ladies, back to my story.

I have a terrible time remembering whatever I read. The second the back cover is closed, almost all of it has escaped my mind.

But, I remember the emotions I had while reading. This is why I continue to read in public.

I read “Norwegian Wood” by Haruki Murakami in Japan. I remember reading about the main character’s time in Tokyo while I myself was in Tokyo. My cousins kept telling me to “put the book down” and “talk to them and enjoy the scenery.” In my defense, I only read when we were sitting down. And if I had to chit-chat the whole time, we would not have all made it back to the States in one piece. Also, how often do you get to read a Japanese book in Japan? They just didn’t get it.

I read “People We Meet On Vacation” by Emily Henry on the beach in Maui. I remember being so enthralled and excited that I was also on vacation (meeting no one), that I didn’t notice I was turning lobster-red in the sun. My mom grabbed the book out of my hand and sprayed me down with SPF 2 million, wrapped me up in her own sarong and towels, and put her atrociously large sun hat on me. I was 22 years old at the time. Too old to be coddled and stifled by a sun hat. Now, I really wasn’t going to meet anyone on vacation.

I was reading “The Song of Achilles” by Madeline Miller in my grandparents’ living room, with them present, and knew I was going to have to be alone to finish the book.

I finished the book in my “woman cave” in the basement of my grandparents’ house. I was sobbing as I closed the book and threw it across the room due to sorrow and angst. I recommend that book to everyone. It’s in my top five books of all time.

Reading in public places, and in various settings around the world, has given me a stronger connection to the books I’ve read. It’s also heightened my experiences during my trips around the world, and even around my own neighborhood.

When I sit in front of my shelf, I can't remember one word on those pages. But I remember the memories of where I was and what I was feeling while reading them, even though it might have been "embarrassing" at the time.

The next time you walk past someone laughing out loud at words on a page, or smearing the ink on the page due to their tears, take a picture of the book in their hands. It's probably a good one.