BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT

¡HOLA PAPI!: HOW TO COME OUT IN A WALMART PARKING LOT AND OTHER LIFE LESSONS

JOHN PAUL BRAMMER

2022 BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY BOOK PRIZE WINNER
BOOK SYNOPSIS

The first time someone called John Paul (JP) Brammer “Papi” was on the gay hookup app Grindr. At first, it was flattering; Brammer took this as white-guy speak for “hey, handsome.” But then it happened again and again…and again, leaving Brammer wondering: Who the hell is Papi?

Soon, this racialized moniker became the inspiration for his now wildly popular advice column, “¡Hola Papi!,” launching his career as the Cheryl Strayed for young queer people (and some straight people too). Brammer had his doubts at first. What advice could he really offer while he himself stumbled through his early twenties? Sometimes the best advice comes from looking within, though, which is what Brammer does in his column and book—and readers have flocked to him for honest, heartfelt wisdom and laughs.

In this hilarious, tenderhearted book, Brammer shares his story of growing up biracial and closeted in America’s heartland, while attempting to answer some of life’s most challenging questions: How do I let go of the past? How do I become the person I want to be? Is there such a thing as being too gay? Should I hook up with my grade school bully now that he’s out of the closet? Questions we’ve all asked ourselves, surely.

¡Hola Papi! is “a warm, witty compendium of hard-won life lessons” (Harper’s Bazaar) for anyone—gay, straight and everything in between—who has ever taken stock of their unique place in the world.

BKLYN BOOK CLUB KIT: ¡HOLA PAPI!
AUTHOR BIO: JOHN PAUL BRAMMER

John Paul Brammer is an author, illustrator and columnist from rural Oklahoma currently living in Brooklyn. He runs the popular advice column “¡Hola Papi!” on Substack. His work—including essays, short fiction and illustrations,—has appeared in The Washington Post, Food & Wine, Catapult, Business Insider and many more. ¡Hola Papi! is his first book. He runs a print shop where he puts his artwork and designs at HolaPapiShop.com. You can keep up with him on Twitter or Instagram @JPBrammer.

LEARN MORE ABOUT JOHN PAUL BRAMMER AT JPBRAMMER.COM.
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

WARNING: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS INCLUDE SPOILERS!

1. The author initially sees the phrase “¡Hola Papi!” when chatting with a man on Grindr, exposing one of the many race-related issues that men of color deal with on the app. How does this title contend with how Brammer views himself. How does he ultimately reclaim it to serve himself and the LGBTQ+ community?

2. In chapter two, Brammer reveals the extent of the bullying he faced in middle school for being perceived as gay. Instead of standing up for him, the school principal said, “This is just what boys do.” What are other ways the school failed Brammer? What can educators do to improve their methods of identifying, minimizing and supporting victims of bullying?

3. In chapter three, Brammer highlights the notion of “the lost years” and his hesitation to accept concepts such as “gold star gay.” How does Brammer view his high school girlfriend? What are some examples in pop culture of “the lost years” that negatively portray women and gay men who have been with women. Why do you think this could be harmful rhetoric?

THESE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS WERE CREATED BY THE PUBLISHER SIMON & SCHUSTER AND ARE NOT AFFILIATED WITH BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY.

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In chapter four, Brammer discusses growing up feeling like an “American with a squeeze of lime.” What does he ultimately conclude about his ethnicity and heritage and how does he uncover these complexities?

In chapter six, Brammer states, “love is nothing without fiction.” What does this mean to you? What are some of the other ideas Brammer posits about love, and do you agree with them? Why or why not?

In chapter seven, Brammer confronts internalized homophobia when a former school bully propositions him on a dating app. This leads to broader, more complex questions: How can we forgive others and ourselves for pain we knowingly or unknowingly caused out of fear? And how can we end the cycles of self-hatred and internalized biases that we learn while growing up?
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7. In chapter thirteen, Brammer reflects on the power that art and stories hold while watching The Great Comet of 1812. How is this juxtaposed with the cyber bullying Brammer received for his own art? And what do you think the comet signifies to Brammer and how he chooses to view his life?

8. In the final chapter, Brammer states, “We can’t live without stories. The ones we tell ourselves often end up guiding our daily lives,” leading to the claim, “you [the reader] are an author.” What do you make of these statements? What are some of the ways that we create and tell stories about ourselves and our lives?

9. This memoir is stylized as an advice column and collection of essays. How does the essay and advice column format allow Brammer to connect more seamlessly with the reader while unpacking his story and doling out life lessons?

10. In ¡HOLA PAPI! Brammer often dissects identity and the places in which various identities intersect. What are some of the other central themes in this book, and how do these themes connect with the continuous exploration of identity?

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Recipe: Frijol Con Puerco
(Pork and Black Bean Dinner)

For me, this is the perfect cold weather dinner, which seems a little odd, since the only place in Mexico that claims it as a serious regional specialty is the always-warm Yucatán. Most of the time I let it simmer away all day in a slow cooker, filling the house with its remarkably earthy, sweet aroma, though it's just as easy to do a faster braise on the stovetop. My cold weather association with soul-satisfying, stick-to-your-ribs pork and black beans has lead me to call for canned fire-roasted tomatoes here. Should I be moved to make a summer version, I’d use fresh tomatoes from my garden or the farmers’ market—fresh tomatoes that are roasted and blended for the braise and simply chopped in the salsa to serve alongside.

The dish is pretty complete by itself, though you may enjoy white rice or a leafy salad, perhaps both, as accompaniments.

Serves 6 to 8

To ensure that the dish tastes exceptionally rich, I first brown the pork over medium-high heat in either a large (12-inch) skillet or the removable, stovetop-safe insert of my slow cooker.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, olive oil, bacon drippings or freshly rendered pork lard

When the oil is hot, I add the meat in a single, uncrowded layer.
FRIJOL CON PUERCO (PORK AND BLACK BEAN DINNER) CONT.

1 ½ pounds boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes and trimmed of extraneous fat

I sprinkle the meat generously with about a teaspoon of salt. As the cubes brown, I flip them until they’re browned on all sides, about 10 minutes. I either scrape the meat into the slow cooker or transfer the slow-cooker insert into its base, then add:

1 ½ quarts water
1 pound (about 2 ¼ cups) dry black beans, picked over to remove any stones or debris
1 medium white onion, chopped into ½-inch pieces
A big spread of epazote (optional)

I cover the slow cooker and turn it on high. The beans and meat will be done in about 6 hours, though you can simmer them for longer. (My slow cooker can be programmed to switch after 6 hours from high to a warm, low temperature for another 6 hours. Some slow cookers click to keep-warm automatically; others need to be switched manually.)

(A quick parenthesis: If I’m making this on the stovetop, I brown the pork in a 4-quart Dutch oven, then add 2 quarts water and the beans. I partially cover the pot and cook it at a simmer over medium-low for 2 ½ hours, stirring every half hour or so and adding more water when the liquid drops below the level of beans.)

While the meat and beans are cooking, I make the tomato-green chile sauce. In a very large (12-inch) skillet, I heat the pan over medium-high.

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2 tablespoons vegetable oil, olive oil, bacon drippings or freshly rendered pork lard

*When the oil is hot, I add:*

1 medium white onion, chopped into ½-inch pieces

*Then stir until the onion begins to brown. While it's cooking, I pour the tomatoes into a blender.*

One 28-ounce can fire roasted diced tomatoes in juice, undrained

*I pulse the tomatoes a few times until coarsely pureed. I pour the puree into the pan with the onions. Then I add:*

2 fresh serrano or jalapeño chiles, stemmed and roughly chopped into small pieces (in Yucatán, they'd use ½ to 1 habanero)

*Now I cook, stirring regularly, until the mixture is thick enough to hold its shape in a spoon.*

*I season the sauce with salt (usually ½ teaspoon) and stir half the mixture into the beans. Then I season the meat and beans, usually with 1½ teaspoons more salt.*
INTERVIEWS WITH JOHN PAUL BRAMMER

- Los Angeles Times - "Latinx Files: John Paul Brammer and the making of a 'Queer Latino Dear Abby'"
- The New York Times - "John Paul Brammer Is Obsessed with Kate Bush"
- BookRiot - "How ¡Hola Papi! Helps Me Navigate My Queerness"
- KGOU - "John Paul Brammer Reflects on Growing Up Closeted in Rural Oklahoma in Debut Memoir ¡Hola, Papi!"
BKLYN BOOKMATCH READALIKES

Did you enjoy ¡Hola Papí!: How to Come Out in a Walmart Parking Lot and Other Life Lessons? Want to read something similar? Check out these readalike titles below.

- **Another Appalachia: Coming Up Queer and Indian in a Mountain Place** by Neema Avashia
- **High-Risk Homosexual: A Memoir** by Edgar Gomez
- **Brown Neon** by Raquel Gutiérrez
- **The Groom Will Keep His Name** by Matt Ortile
- **How to Write an Autobiographical Novel** by Alexander Chee

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