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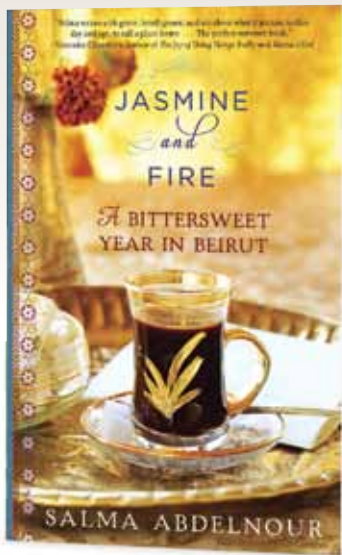
BOOK CLUB

What Will You Read Next?

Volume 4



Suggested titles and sample discussion questions
for the **Book Clubs @ Your Library**



Salma Abdelnour

Jasmine and Fire: A Bittersweet Year in Beirut

978-0-307-88594-4 | \$14.00/\$17.00C | Broadway | TR
978-0-307-88595-1

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of *Funny in Farsi* by Firoozeh Dumas, *Tender at the Bone* by Ruth Reichl, and *Iran Awakening* by Shirin Ebadi.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Salma Abdelnour was nine years old when, in July of 1981, with the echo of rocket blasts in their ears, her parents grabbed her and her brother, flew them out of bloody, civil-war-ripped Lebanon, and planted them in a quiet, safe place between the endless green lawns of suburban Houston. Now, thirty years later, testing a lifelong hunch that Lebanon is still her real and true home—the place where, as an Arab, a Beirut, she'd never feel like a stranger the way she sometimes still does in America—Salma returns. *Jasmine and Fire* is the story of her grown-up adventures in Beirut—about her rediscovery of a Lebanon of beauty and tragedy, of despair and hope.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In the introduction to *Jasmine and Fire*, Salma describes her lifelong craving for home, but she also wonders, “What did home mean anyway?” For Salma, the sense of losing *home* kicked in after her family left Beirut, but as the years went on, that sense became more nebulous, even as it persisted. What does home mean for you?
2. Even though Salma has spent years as a travel and food writer for magazines and newspapers, when she first arrives in Beirut in August, she's overwhelmed with a sense of sadness and anxiety. Why? Think back to the last few times you've gone on a trip. What feelings did you have when you arrived?
3. In the October chapter, Salma throws herself a housewarming dinner party to both symbolize and celebrate her move to Beirut, and also to feel more at home in the apartment and the city. What details of that dinner party, or Salma's preparations for it, stood out to you the most?

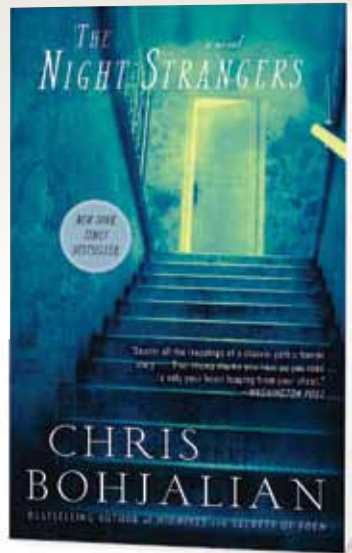
For more discussion questions visit www.ReadItForward.com

Chris Bohjalian
The Night Strangers:
A Novel

978-0-307-39500-9 | \$15.00/\$18.00C | Broadway | TR
📞 978-0-307-88886-0 | 📻 LP: 978-0-7393-7836-6
📀 CD: 978-0-307-94079-7 | 📺 AD: 978-0-307-94080-3

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of *The Night Room* by Peter Straub, *The Dead Path* by Stephen M. Irwin, *Bag of Bones* by Stephen King, as well as for Bohjalian's many fans.



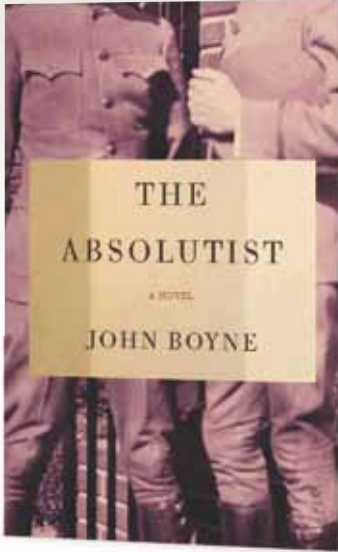
ABOUT THE BOOK:

In a dusty corner of a basement in a rambling Victorian house in northern New Hampshire, a door has long been sealed shut with 39 six-inch-long carriage bolts. The home's new owners are Chip and Emily Linton and their twin daughters. Together they hope to rebuild their lives after Chip, an airline pilot, has to ditch his regional jet in Lake Champlain due to double engine failure, and most of the passengers die on impact or drown. The body count? Thirty-nine—a coincidence not lost on Chip when he discovers the number of bolts in that basement door...or when he finds himself haunted by the passengers who died in the water.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How sharp were your detective skills as you read *The Night Strangers*? Did your assumptions about the basement, Chip's visions, and the herbalists prove to be correct?
2. Chris Bohjalian wrote Chip's scenes in the second person ("you"), present tense. How did this affect your reading? What was it like to be in Chip's mind?
3. Discuss the portrait of marriage and family conveyed by the Lintons. We're told that before the plane crash, Emily and the girls were self-sufficient while Chip was away on flights. What else stayed the same after the crash? What were the greatest strains on the family as a result of Chip's PTSD? How does Emily and Chip's marriage compare to Clary and John's?
4. Discuss the plants from which the herbalists take their names (reseda and anise in particular). Throughout the book's "recipes," what did you discover about nature's ability to heal or poison, and to bring clarity or hallucination?

For more discussion questions visit <http://www.ChrisBohjalian.com>



John Boyne

The Absolutist:

A Novel

978-1-59051-552-5 | \$16.95 | Other Press | TR

📞 978-1-59051-553-2

READERS' ADVISORY:
For readers of *Atonement* and
Brokeback Mountain.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

From the author of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. This masterful tale of passion, jealousy, heroism and betrayal is set in the gruesome trenches of France during WWI and keeps you on the edge of your seat until its most extraordinary and unexpected denouement. Literary but with the masterful storytelling restraint of a thriller, Boyne is a master of unraveling a story and he keeps you on the edge of your seat until the very last page.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When Tristan first enters the Cantwell Inn, Mrs. Cantwell's son, David, presents the question of morality and describes the incident that happens in room four as "a personal indiscretion". What kind of characters does Boyne pose as the authorities and judges of morality in *The Absolutist*? And how does Tristan's complete avoidance of their judgments define his character both negatively and positively?
2. In solitary confinement, Will makes it clear to Tristan what he dislikes about him and what makes them different: Tristan's silent compliance with the injustice of the military system and his insistence that their intimate moments hold some greater meaning come to repulse Will. Yet when Will removes his blindfold, his reaction suggests a kind of heartbreak. What do you read from Will's reaction?
3. Subtle hints at Tristan's internal conflicts with his family, with Marian, and with Will build in suspense. By not directly stating the issue of Tristan's sexual orientation until later in the novel, Boyne allows room for a larger, all-encompassing question of identity to develop. Consider Marian's position within her family and her community, David's ignorant desire to join the military, as well as his unhealthy relationship with his mother, and Sergeant Clayton's development into a war fiend. How do each of these individual situations broaden Boyne's theme of troubled self-identity?

For more discussion questions visit www.ReadingGroupGuides.com

Jennifer Close

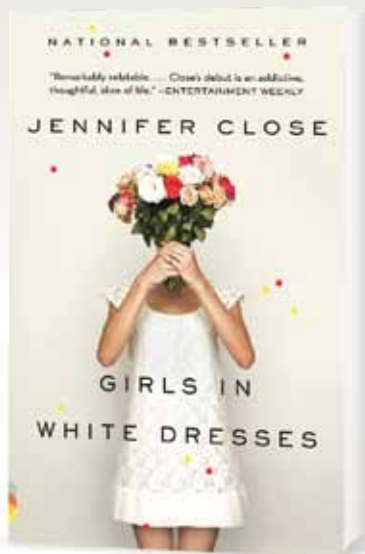
Girls in White Dresses

978-0-307-74369-5 | \$14.95 | Vintage | TR | 978-0-307-70041-4

CD: 978-0-307-93934-0 | AD: 978-0-307-93935-7

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of *Something Borrowed* by Emily Giffin; *Little Earthquakes* by Jennifer Weiner; *Circle of Friends* by Maeve Binchy; *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan; *How to Make an American Quilt* by Whitney Otto.



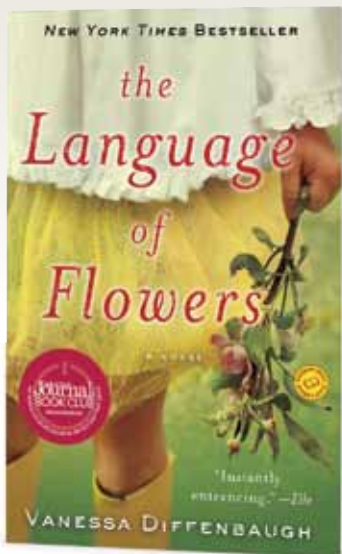
ABOUT THE BOOK:

Isabella, Mary, and Lauren feel like everyone they know is getting married. On Sunday after Sunday, at bridal shower after shower, they coo over toasters, collect ribbons and wrapping paper, eat minuscule sandwiches and doll-sized cakes. They wear pastel dresses and drink champagne by the case, but amid the celebration these women have their own lives to contend with: Isabella is working a dead-end job at a mailing-list company, Mary is dating a nice guy with an awful mother, and Lauren is waitressing at a midtown bar and wondering why she's attracted to the sleazy bartender. With a wry sense of humor, Jennifer Close brings us through those thrilling, bewildering, what-on-earth-am-I-going-to-do years of early adulthood as she pulls us deep inside the circle of these friends, perfectly capturing the wild frustrations and soaring joys of modern life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Which character did you relate to most closely, and why?
2. How does Close use humor to convey character? Are the women themselves funny, or the situations they find themselves in?
3. Ambivalence—toward jobs, men, apartments, and children—is a recurring theme in *Girls in White Dresses*. Why do you think that is?
4. Several of the characters keep some pretty big secrets, such as the way Abby keeps her friends away from her hippy parents. How does this affect Abby's life? How do the book's other secrets affect the characters?
5. Mary wonders why nobody warned her that during her first year as a lawyer, "You will be constantly afraid." (page 120) What role does fear play in the women's lives?

For more discussion questions visit <http://Reading-Group-Center.KnopfDoubleday.com>



Vanessa Diffenbaugh

The Language of Flowers: A Novel

978-0-345-52555-0 | \$15.00/\$18.00C | Ballantine Books | TR

📞 978-0-345-52556-7 | 📻 CD: 978-0-307-87895-3

📍 AD: 978-0-307-87896-0

READERS' ADVISORY:

“A deftly powerful story of finding your way home, even after you’ve burned every bridge behind you.” —Jamie Ford, author of *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*

The perfect read for fans of *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

The Victorian language of flowers was used to convey romantic expressions: honeysuckle for devotion, asters for patience, and red roses for love. But for Victoria Jones, it's been more useful in communicating mistrust and solitude. After a childhood spent in the foster-care system, she is unable to get close to anybody, and her only connection to the world is through flowers and their meanings. Now eighteen and emancipated from the system with nowhere to go, Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But an unexpected encounter with a mysterious stranger has her questioning what's been missing in her life. And when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What potential do Elizabeth, Renata, and Grant see in Victoria that she has a hard time seeing in herself?
2. While Victoria has often been hungry and malnourished in her life, food ends up meaning more than just nourishment to her. What significance does food take on in the book?
3. Why do you think Elizabeth waits so long before trying to patch things up with her long-lost sister Catherine? What is the impetus for her to do so?
4. One of the themes of the book is the idea of forgiveness, of second chances—do you think Victoria deserves a second chance after the things she did (both as a child and as an adult)? What about Catherine? And Elizabeth?

For more discussion questions, an excerpt, and a flower dictionary visit www.VanessaDiffenbaugh.com

Ellen Feldman

Next to Love: A Novel

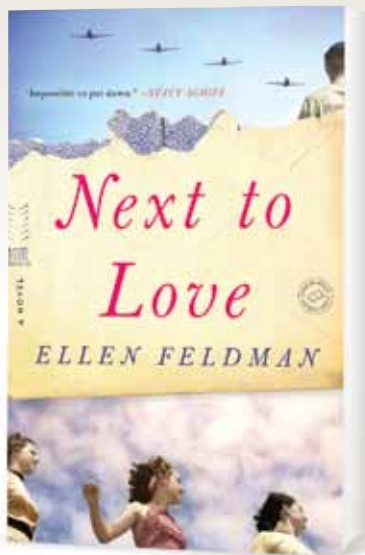
978-0-8129-8241-1 | \$15.00/\$18.00C | Spiegel & Grau | TR

Deluxe Reading Group Edition eBook: 978-0-679-64555-9

CD: 978-0-307-96725-1 | AD: 978-0-307-96726-8

READERS' ADVISORY:

For fans of *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*, *The Postmistress*, and *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*, a story of love, war, loss, and the scars they leave—set during the years of World War II and its aftermath.



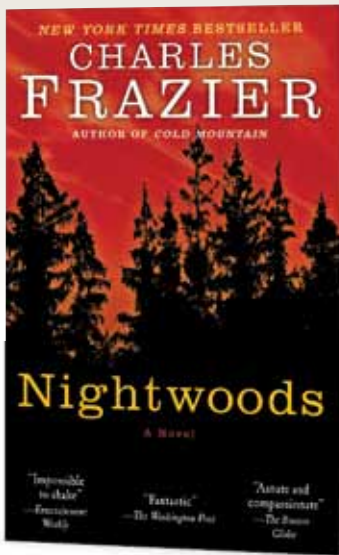
ABOUT THE BOOK:

It's 1941. Babe throws like a boy, thinks for herself, and never expects to escape her quiet Massachusetts town. Then World War II breaks out, and everything changes. Her friend Grace fears being left alone with her daughter when her husband ships out; Millie weds the boy who always refused to settle down; and Babe wonders if she should marry Claude, who even as a child could never harm a living thing. As the war rages abroad, Babe, Grace, and Millie experience the dislocations and the exhilaration of a society in flux—from postwar traumas to women's rights, racial injustice to anti-Semitism. And when the men return, nothing can go back to quite the way it was.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. For nine years, Babe keeps a terrible secret. How much of a toll do you think it takes on her? Does her hardscrabble background make her tougher than Grace and Millie in the face of adversity?
2. In the post WWII era, combat fatigue, or what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, was a dark secret. There was little therapy, and no support groups existed. Do you think in that era Babe could have found better ways to cope with Claude's problems? Should she have insisted they have a child? Would you have blamed her if she left him?
3. Grace and Millie have diametrically opposite reactions to losing their husbands, and both think they are trying to protect their children. Do you think they really believed that, or were they merely justifying their own predilections? What effect does Grace's behavior have on her daughter Amy? What does Millie's have on her son Jack?
4. Is Grace really so devoted to Charlie's memory or is she afraid of a new relationship? What does her breakdown in the front yard say about her feelings toward her late husband and herself?

For more discussion questions visit www.RandomHouse.com



Charles Frazier

Nightwoods:

A Novel

978-0-8129-7880-3 | \$16.00/\$19.00C | RH Trade Paperbacks | TR
978-0-679-64414-9 | CD: 978-0-307-96652-0
AD: 978-0-307-96653-7 | LP: 978-0-7393-7840-3

READERS' ADVISORY:

“With its reclusive, introspective heroine, poetic prose and obsessed, violent antagonist, *Nightwoods* almost reads like the deliciously twisted love child of Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping* and Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men* . . . taut and chilling.”

—*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

ABOUT THE BOOK:

The acclaimed author of *Cold Mountain* and *Thirteen Moons* returns with a dazzling novel of suspense and love set in small-town North Carolina in the early 1960s. With Luce, a young woman who inherits her murdered sister’s troubled twins, Frazier has created his most memorable heroine. Before the children, Luce was content with the reimbursements of the rich Appalachian landscape, choosing to live apart from the small community around her. But the coming of the children changes everything, cracking open her solitary life in difficult, hopeful, dangerous ways.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Luce feels obligated to care for her sister’s children even though she admits she is not a maternal person and does not love the children. Discuss this choice. How is Luce’s sense of obligation informed by her relationship with her own mother and father?
2. Think about Luce’s connection to her elder friends. What is it about Luce that draws her toward Maddie, old Stubblefield, and her grade school teachers?
3. Think about the scene in which Luce tells Lit about the rape. Is he only being insensitive and rude, or is there a part of him that is actually trying to protect Luce from more pain and disruption, albeit in an insensitive way?
4. Luce and Stubblefield are alike in some ways, and in others they are very different. Why do you think they are attracted to each other? Discuss which character changes the most over the course of the novel.
5. Bud and Lit manage to form an unlikely bond. What is Bud looking for in Lit? And what is Lit looking for in Bud? What draws the two men apart, and ultimately leads to Lit’s death?

For more discussion questions visit www.RandomHouseReadersCircle.com

Juliann Garey

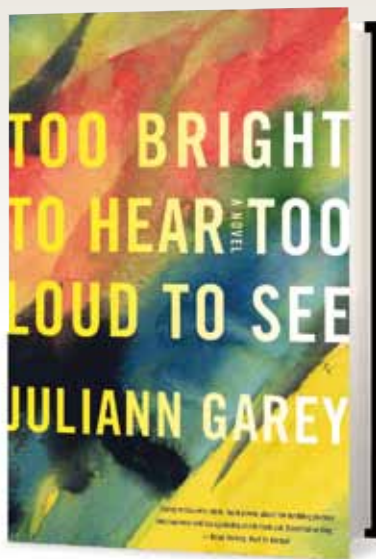
Too Bright to Hear Too Loud to See

978-1-61695-129-0 | \$25.00/\$29.95C | Soho Press | HC

December 2012

978-1-61695-130-6

READERS' ADVISORY:
For readers of *Girl, Interrupted*, and
I Know This Much is True.



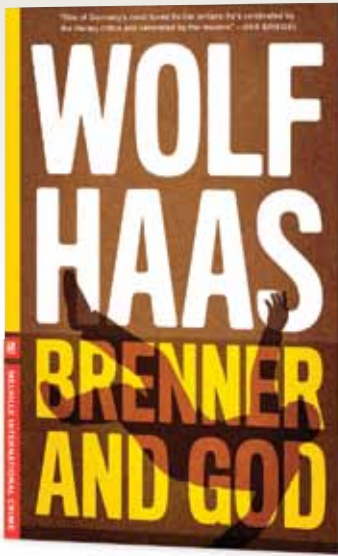
ABOUT THE BOOK:

A page-turning literary novel whose subject matter—bipolar disorder, Hollywood—gives it wide potential appeal. Takes us inside the restless mind, ravaged heart, and anguished soul of Greyson Todd, a successful Hollywood studio executive who leaves his wife and young daughter and for a decade travels the world giving free reign to the bipolar disorder he's been forced to keep hidden for almost 20 years.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Over the course of the novel, Greyson does a lot of damage to a lot of people. To what degree do you think he is responsible for his actions?
2. At a certain point in the book Greyson says that “choice is what’s left after family is done screwing you.” Do you think it’s possible to escape the emotional and/or biological shadow of your family and write your own story?
3. How is the theme of memory manifested in the structure of the novel? Why is this important?
4. How much of a role do you think the atmosphere of Hollywood and the film industry played in Greyson’s mental decline?
5. In 1982 Greyson felt he had to hide his bipolar disorder to keep his job. Does the stigma still exist today? If so, why do you think we’re so afraid of it? If not, what do you believe has led to this change in our beliefs?

For more discussion questions visit www.SohoPress.com



Wolf Haas; Translated by Annie Janusch **Brenner and God**

978-1-61219-113-3 | \$14.95/\$14.95C | Melville House | TR
📞 978-1-61219-114-0

READERS' ADVISORY:

"Brenner and God is one of the cleverest — and most thoroughly enjoyable—mysteries that I've read in a long time. Wolf Haas is the real deal, and his arrival on the American book scene is long overdue." —Carl Hiaasen

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Simon Brenner is an ex-detective who's now turned to a quieter career as the personal chauffeur for two-year-old Helena, the daughter of a Munich construction giant and a Viennese abortion doctor. One day, while Brenner's attention is turned to picking out a chocolate bar for Helena at the gas station, Helena gets snatched from the car. Now out of a job, Brenner decides to investigate her disappearance on his own. With both parents in the public eye, there's no scarcity of leads—the father's latest development project has spurred public protest, and the mother's clinic has been targeted by the zealous leader of an anti-abortion group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Wolf Haas is celebrated in Germany for his blending of slapstick humor and politically engaged commentary. What is it about humor that makes it easier to deal with difficult questions like social inequality, political corruption, and abortion? Did you think any differently about any of these topics after reading the novel?
2. Throughout the novel, the author uses biblical and Christian symbolism for comedic purposes (Knoll's monk-like haircut, the "inverse Adam" of Detective Peinhaupt on the operating table, Brenner's filthy baptism). Can you think of any other examples of religious symbolism in the book?
3. Wolf Haas never explicitly reveals the identity of his chatty, nearly gossipy narrator. Who do you think the narrator is?
4. Simon Brenner's investigation hinges upon the lives of two lost girls: Two-year-old Helena, whose kidnapping is treated with humor, and teenage Sunny, whose life as a sexually exploited party girl is described in tragic terms. What is Haas attempting to communicate with these two very different lives?

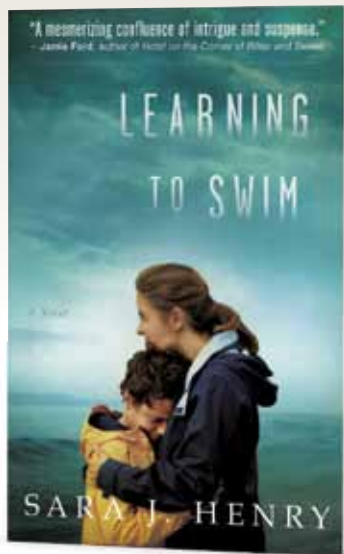
For more discussion questions visit www.MHPBooks.com/Books/Brenner-And-God

Sara J. Henry
Learning to Swim: A Novel

978-0-307-71839-6 | \$15.00/\$17.00C | Broadway | TR
978-0-307-71840-2

READERS' ADVISORY:

Acclaimed by the *New York Times Book Review* as "the perfect romantic suspense mystery for people who won't admit they read romantic suspense mysteries," this will appeal to fans of Gillian Flynn and Lisa Unger.



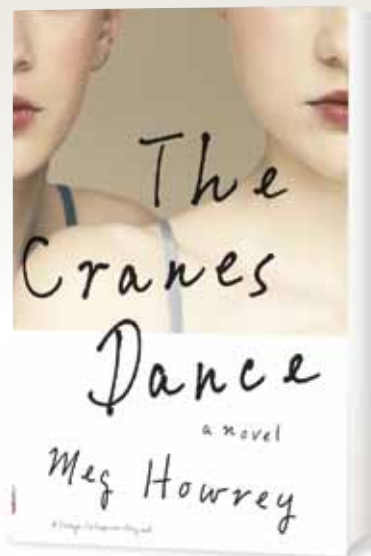
ABOUT THE BOOK:

When she witnesses a small child tumbling from a ferry into Lake Champlain, Troy Chance dives in without thinking. Harrowing moments later, she bobs to the surface, pulling a terrified little boy with her. And Troy, a freelance writer, finds herself as fiercely determined to protect Paul as she is to find out what happened to him. What she uncovers will take her into a world of wealth and privilege and heedless self-indulgence—a world in which the murder of a child is not unthinkable. She'll need skill and courage to survive and protect her charge and herself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The novel opens when Troy dives into Lake Champlain to save a child she had seen only for a split second. Have you ever been in a similar situation? How did you react?
2. Troy describes her attachment to the little boy she rescues as quick and atavistic, and wonders if this is what her sisters felt like when they had their children. Do you think a maternal bond is instinctive and instant? Do you think a similar bond could be formed by people who share a traumatic experience?
3. Hoping to protect Paul from being put into foster care, or possibly being returned to a bad home situation, Troy keeps him at her home until she can track down his father. Why do you think she does this? Was she right to keep the police out of it?
4. Troy thinks she will be able to tell immediately if Paul's father had anything to do with his kidnapping. Is it possible to be so sure about a person's motives based on a first impression or gut reaction? What did your instincts tell you about Philippe when he and Troy first met?

For more discussion questions visit www.ReadItForward.com



Meg Howrey

The Cranes Dance: A Novel

978-0-307-94982-0 | \$14.95/\$17.95C | Vintage | TR
978-0-307-94983-7

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of Jeffery Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*; Shirley Hazzard, *The Transit of Venus*; Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*; Colum McCann, *Dancer*.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Kate and Gwen have always had the same dream: leave Michigan, move to the big city and become prima ballerinas. Accepted into a prestigious Manhattan company right out of high school, Kate is relieved when Gwen follows in her footsteps one year later to share a cramped apartment, friends, and a life full of grueling rehearsals. But when Gwen is marked as the better dancer, a new jealousy begins to take hold of Kate, one that causes her to turn a blind eye to her sister's increasingly odd behavior, including a strange obsession with numbers and erratic mood swings. Now, as Kate struggles to hang onto her own sanity amidst the emotional aftermath of letting Gwen fall apart, she's offered a chance to take over Gwen's role, leaving her to decide if she can step into her sister's life completely.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

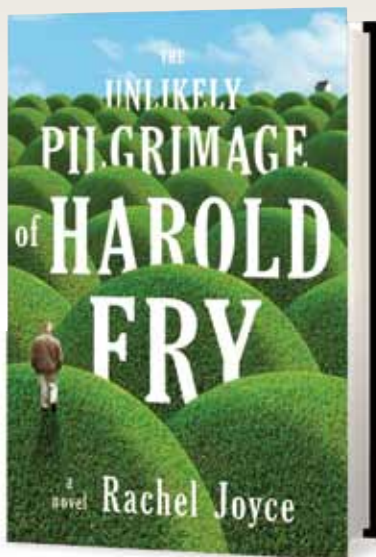
1. Why does Meg Howrey use the passage from *Through the Looking-Glass* as an epigraph for *The Cranes Dance*? In what ways is the quote thematically relevant to the novel?
2. Throughout the novel, Kate directly addresses her readers: "I haven't assigned you a face or body, invisible audience member, let alone a background in the arts" [p. 4]. "You don't know a goddamn thing, you're just following the story like anyone else, right?" [p. 61]. "I like how quiet you are, which allows me to go on performing" [p. 91]. What is the effect of being addressed in this way? In what ways is Kate's narrative a kind of performance?
3. Kate writes: "Sentences are trenches you can take cover in. They are not wildly comfortable. They are not bulletproof. But they can give you the illusion of safety" [p. 287]. Kate is clearly exposing much of her inner life in the novel. Is she also "taking cover" in her writing, or in the way she speaks with others?
4. What makes Kate and Gwen's relationship so complex and challenging? How does Gwen's absence—and lack of communication—affect Kate?

For more discussion questions visit <http://Reading-Group-Center.KnopfDoubleday.com>

Rachel Joyce
**The Unlikely
Pilgrimage of
Harold Fry: A Novel**

978-0-8129-9329-5 | \$25.00 | Random House | HC
978-0-385-67769-1 | \$29.95C | Bond Street Books | HC
📞 978-0-679-64511-5 | 📻 CD: 978-0-449-01277-2
🔊 AD: 978-0-449-01278-9

READERS' ADVISORY:
A debut novel perfect for fans of
Major Pettigrew's Last Stand.



ABOUT THE BOOK:

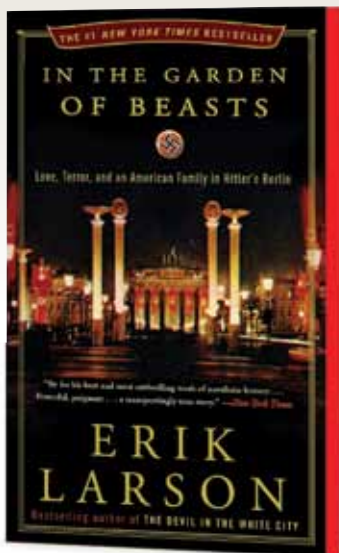
Met Harold Fry, recently retired. He lives in a small English village with his wife, Maureen, who seems irritated by almost everything he does, even down to how he butters his toast. Little differentiates one day from the next. But when a morning walk to the corner mailbox to send a letter to an ailing friend transforms into a pilgrimage across 600 miles of English countryside, something extraordinary happens.

A novel of unsentimental charm, humor, faith, and forgiveness, *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* offers profound insights into the thoughts and feelings we all bury deep within our hearts.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Harold's journey is both physical and metaphorical. He is not the only character in the novel to go on a journey, and Rachel Joyce has said that writing the book was in itself a journey. What other literary journeys does this novel call to mind?
2. Harold says he is not a religious man but his journey is called a pilgrimage and it is undoubtedly a leap of faith. How much and how consciously do you feel Joyce draws on Christian tenets and/or other belief systems in the novel?
3. Harold is a man with many flaws. Despite, or perhaps because of this, do you see him as an archetypal Englishman? Or is he an Everyman?
4. The mental health of several characters is called into question in the novel. Depression, Alzheimer's, and addiction are all diseases that touch many of us and yet mental illness remains to a great extent taboo in our society. How is Joyce using this? Do you find it effective?

For more discussion questions visit www.RandomHouse.com



Erik Larson

In the Garden of Beasts: Love, Terror, and an American Family in Hitler's Berlin

978-0-307-40885-3 | \$16.00/\$19.00C | Broadway | TR
📖 978-0-307-88795-5 | 📖 LP: 978-0-7393-7814-4
📻 CD: 978-0-307-91459-0 | 📻 AD: 978-0-307-91460-6

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of narrative nonfiction, especially the legions of *Devil in the White City* fans! The family story that forms the narrative thread of this book will offer plenty of discussion points for reading groups.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Berlin, 1933. William E. Dodd is a mild-mannered academic from Chicago who to his own and everyone else's surprise becomes America's first ambassador to Hitler's Germany, in a year that proves to be a turning point in history. Dodd moves his family to the city where they observe firsthand the many changes—some subtle, some disturbing, and some horrifically violent—that signaled Hitler's consolidation of power. Suffused with the tense atmosphere of the times, and with brilliant portraits of Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, and Himmler, *In the Garden of Beasts* lends a unique, eyewitness perspective on events as they unfold in real time. The result is an unforgettable, addictively readable work of narrative nonfiction.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In his prologue ("Das Vorspiel"), Erik Larson writes, "There are no heroes here, at least not of the *Schindler's List* variety, but there are glimmers of heroism." What heroism did you find in this history? Who were the greatest cowards?
2. Discuss the significance of the title, derived from a literal translation of the word *Tiergarten*. What is captured in the deceptive beauty of the garden, a refuge for many of the men and women described in the book? What does it take to transform a beautiful creature into a "beast"?
3. How was Martha able to appear youthful, even virginal, yet also sophisticated? What made her attractive to such a broad variety of men, from literary figures to military leaders? What type of man was she most attracted to? How did these men compare to her father?
4. Larson describes Roosevelt's struggle when no one would take the job as U.S. Ambassador to Germany. Would you have accepted the job if you had been in Dodd's situation?

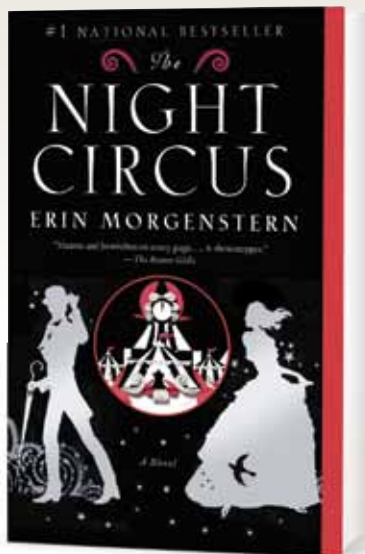
For more discussion questions visit <http://www.RandomHouse.com/Crown/Readers-Guides>

Erin Morgenstern
The Night Circus

978-0-307-74443-2 | \$15.00 | Anchor | TR
978-0-385-67173-6 | \$21.00C | Anchor Canada | TR
📞 978-0-385-53464-2 | 📄 CD: 978-0-307-93892-3
📻 AD: 978-0-307-93893-0

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of Aimee Bender, *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*; Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*; Audrey Niffenegger, *The Time Traveler's Wife*; Ransom Riggs, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*.



ABOUT THE BOOK:

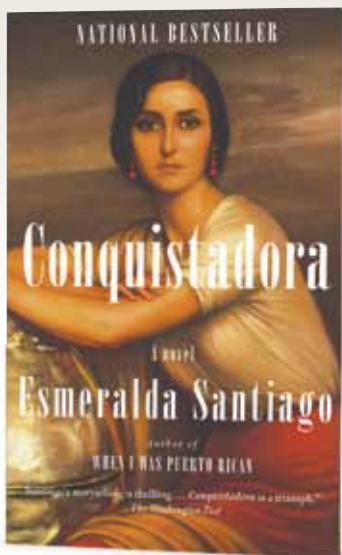
The circus arrives without warning. Within *Le Cirque de Rêves'* black-and-white striped canvas tents lies an utterly unique experience full of breathtaking amusements that only appear at night. But behind the scenes, it is a battleground for a fierce competition: a duel between two young illusionists, Celia and Marco, who have been trained to fight since childhood by their mercurial instructors. Unbeknownst to them, this is a game in which only one can be left standing, and as the stakes rise and Celia and Marco tumble unexpectedly into love, it leaves every player's fate hanging in the balance.

WINNER 2012 ALA Alex Award.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The novel opens with a quote from Oscar Wilde: "A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world." How is this sentiment explored in *The Night Circus*? Who in the novel is a dreamer? And what is their punishment for being so?
2. The novel frequently changes narrative perspective. How does this transition shape your reading of the novel and your connection to the characters and the circus? Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from varied perspectives?
3. There are a number of allusions to Shakespeare throughout the text: *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, and *As You Like It*. Explain these references—how does each play reveal itself in the novel?
4. What role does time play in the novel? From Friedrich Thiessen's clock, to the delayed aging of the circus developers, to the birth of the twins—is time manipulated or fated at the circus?

For more discussion questions visit <http://Reading-Group-Center.KnopfdDoubleday.com/>



Esmeralda Santiago

Conquistadora:

A Novel

978-0-307-38859-9 | \$15.95/\$18.95C | Vintage | TR

📞 978-0-307-59677-2 | 📄 CD: 978-0-307-93896-1

📻 AD: 978-0-307-93897-8

READERS' ADVISORY:

“The issues of social caste, slavery, and sex roles make this a fascinating read. It’s an outstanding story, full of pathos, tropical sensuality, and violence—but it also poses uncomfortable moral questions readers are forced to consider . . . Storytelling genius . . . *Conquistadora* is a book-group must.”

— Jen Baker, *Booklist* (starred review)

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Ana Larragoity Cubillas has been drawn to Puerto Rico ever since she was a little girl, mesmerized by the diaries of an ancestor who traveled there with Ponce de León. When she meets handsome twin brothers Ramón and Inocente—both in love with Ana—her dreams seem within reach; she marries Ramón and travels across the ocean to a remote sugar plantation the brothers have inherited on the island. But soon the Civil War erupts in the United States, and Ana finds her livelihood, and perhaps even her life, threatened by the very people on whose backs her wealth has been built: the hacienda’s slaves, whose richly drawn stories unfold alongside her own.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Santiago’s epigraph is an excerpt from “Adam” by William Carlos Williams: “Underneath the whisperings/of tropic nights/there is a darker whispering/that death invents especially/for northern men/whom the tropics/ have come to hold.” Why do you think she chose this passage?
2. Santiago’s first book was the best-selling memoir *When I Was Puerto Rican*, which told an entirely different sort of history: that of her own journey from Puerto Rico to the United States. Yet *Conquistadora* also makes the personal historical. How do fact and fiction play off each other in this story? How is reading historical fiction different from reading a nonfiction historical account of a time period?
3. As the book begins, how do you feel about Ana? Is she a likable character? What one word would you use to describe her?
4. Discuss Ana’s relationship with Elena. What draws these women together—and what drives them apart? How do their motivations for getting married differ?

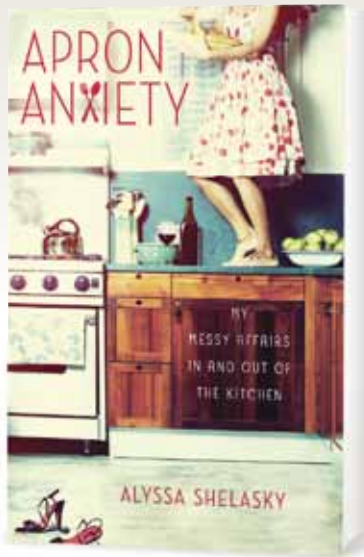
For more discussion questions visit <http://Reading-Group-Center.KnopfDoubleday.com>

Alyssa Shelasky
Apron Anxiety:
My Messy Affairs In and Out
of the Kitchen

978-0-307-95214-1 | \$14.00/\$17.00C | Three Rivers Press | TR
978-0-307-95215-8

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of *Chocolate and Zucchini* by Clotilde Dusoulier, *The Sweet Life in Paris* by David Lebovitz, and *The Sharper Your Knife, the Less You Cry* by Kathleen Flinn.



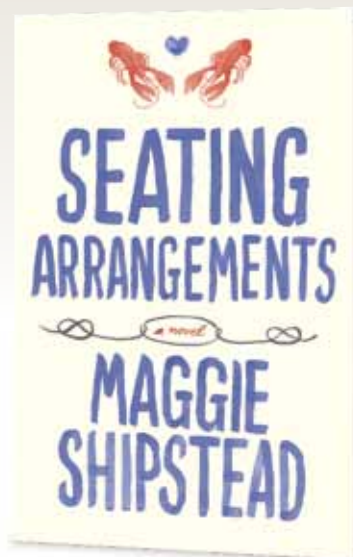
ABOUT THE BOOK:

Three months into a relationship with her TV-chef crush, celebrity journalist Alyssa Shelasky left her highly social life in New York City to live with him in D.C. But what followed was no fairy tale: Chef hours are tough on a relationship. Surrounded by foodies yet unable to make a cup of tea, she was displaced and discouraged. Motivated at first by self-preservation rather than culinary passion, Shelasky embarked on a journey to master the kitchen, and she created the blog Apron Anxiety (ApronAnxiety.com) to share her stories. This is a memoir about learning to cook, the ups and downs of love, and entering the world of food full throttle. Includes 30 recipes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Apron Anxiety* opens with the following from celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain: "I would be displeased and scared shitless if my little girl started talking about wanting to be a chef. I guess it could be worse. She could talk about wanting to go OUT with a chef." When you first read this quote, what did you think *Apron Anxiety* was going to be like? Having read it, what do you think of Bourdain's thoughts?
2. In Chapter One, Alyssa recounts her family's eating habits and how these early years shaped her adult tastes. What are your first memories of food? How did your own attitude toward food develop?
3. Talk about the prevalence of food culture these days. What does the word "foodie" mean to you? Does Alyssa consider herself a foodie?
4. When Alyssa first begins cook on her own, she's surprised at how much delight Chef takes in her attempts to share what she thought was his passion alone. Do you think that relationships work best when they are centered on a mutual interest, or when each partner has his/her own "thing?"

For more discussion questions visit www.ReadItForward.com



Maggie Shipstead

Seating Arrangements:

A Novel

978-0-307-59946-9 | \$25.95/\$30.00C | Knopf | HC
978-0-307-95857-0

READERS' ADVISORY:

For fans of *Prep, Maine, The Three Weissmanns of Westport, Girls in White Dresses, and Bridesmaids.*

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Winn Van Meter has a Harvard education, membership in all the right clubs, a pedigreed wife, and a tastefully understated summer home on a pristine New England island where the wedding of his eldest daughter, Daphne, is about to take place. The weather is idyllic and so, it would seem, is the gathering. But: the bride is seven months pregnant; the maid of honor, Daphne's younger sister, has just had her heart broken by the son of her father's oldest rival; Aunt Celeste, herself on her fifth marriage, watches with a jaundiced eye as the groom's exceedingly well-dressed brothers stealthily make their way through the bridal party. And the irresistible siren call of Daphne's best friend, the bombshell bridesmaid Agatha, will drive the bride's father finally to combust, taking the family down with him in a raucous explosion of misplaced attention and thwarted desire, not to mention confetti and wedding cake.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. "The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends / Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed. / And their friends, the loitering heirs of City directors; / Departed, have left no addresses." This is the novel's epigraph, from "The Wasteland," T. S. Eliot's epic poem of ruin and desolation. How does this verse relate to *Seating Arrangements*? Why has the author elected to place it at the front of her novel?
2. Winn is obsessed with status, with matters of appearance and pedigree and joining all the right clubs. What do you think the author thinks of Winn? What did you think of him? Is he sympathetic? Does your view of him change over the course of the novel? Do you think Winn himself changes or grows over the course of the novel?
3. Discuss Dominique's role in *Seating Arrangements*. How is she different from the other characters in the novel, and how does this alter the reader's perspective?

For more discussion questions visit <http://Reading-Group-Center.KnopfDoubleday.com/>

J. Courtney Sullivan
Maine: A Novel

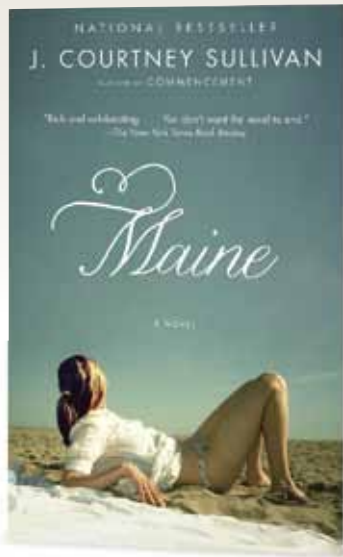
978-0-307-74221-6 | \$15.95/\$18.95C | Vintage | TR

📞 978-0-307-59681-9 | 📻 CD: 978-0-307-91731-7

🔊 AD: 978-0-307-91732-4

READERS' ADVISORY:

For readers of *Somewhere Off the Coast of Maine* by Ann Hood; *A Wedding in December* by Anita Shreve; *Home Safe* by Elizabeth Berg; *Summer People* by Elin Hilderbrand; *The Beans of Egypt, Maine* by Carolyn Chute.



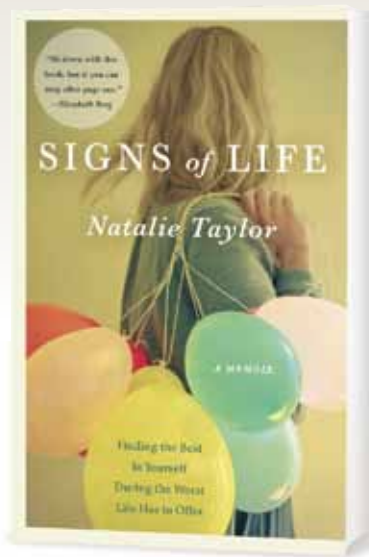
ABOUT THE BOOK:

For the Kellehers, Maine is a place where children run in packs, showers are taken outdoors, and old Irish songs are sung around a piano. As three generations of Kelleher women arrive at the family's beach house, each brings her own hopes and fears. Maggie is thirty-two and pregnant, waiting for the perfect moment to tell her imperfect boyfriend the news; Ann Marie, a Kelleher by marriage, is channeling her domestic frustration into a dollhouse obsession and an ill-advised crush; Kathleen, the black sheep, never wanted to set foot in the cottage again; and Alice, the matriarch at the center of it all, would trade every floorboard for a chance to undo the events of one night, long ago.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The epigraph pairs two quotes; the first is from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem *Aurora Leigh*: "Alas, a mother never is afraid, / Of speaking angrily to any child, / Since love, she knows, is justified of love." The second is from a letter written by F. Scott Fitzgerald to his daughter: "Just do everything we didn't do and you will be perfectly safe." Why did the author put these quotes together? Which characters do you think they refer to?
2. If you had to choose one word to describe the overriding theme of *Maine*, what would it be?
3. Which of the women in the novel would you say is a good mother, and why? Who resents motherhood the most?
4. Discuss how each of the four main characters—Alice, Kathleen, Maggie, and Ann Marie—approaches religion. Who seems to have the most comfortable relationship with God?
5. What was Alice's motivation for changing her will? Why did she wait so long to tell her family?

For more discussion questions visit <http://JCourtneySullivan.com/>



Natalie Taylor

Signs of Life:

A Memoir

978-0-307-71750-4 | \$15.00/\$18.00C | Broadway | TR
978-0-307-71751-1

READERS' ADVISORY:

In the tradition of *The Middle Place*, *A Three Dog Life*, and *Here If You Need Me*, a luminous and unforgettable memoir about love and loss.

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Twenty-four-year-old Natalie Taylor has led a charmed life. She's surrounded by her large, close-knit family, enjoys her meaningful job as a high school English teacher, cherishes being married to her college sweetheart, and is ecstatic about their baby on the way. Then her husband dies in a freak skateboarding accident, and in an instant, life as she knows it is over. With the help of her dark wit, her rich fantasy life, and her love of literature, Natalie finds the strength to come back from the depths of despair. A heartfelt and utterly absorbing story, *Signs of Life* is a powerful coming-of-age tale about grieving and growing up.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Compare Natalie's experience to the times when you have had to find your way back from despair. Which aspects of her story could you relate to easily? Which aspects opened your eyes to the personal, individual nature of grief?
2. Natalie compares her intense need for loyal, authentic supporters to Don Corleone's family: Josh's sister Ashley is in, his college friend Ted is out, after insulting Mathews. Without Josh, how does she create a new sense of trust in her life? How did the different aspects of her "team," including her students and Dr. G., reflect the different needs she experienced?
3. Which of the book's literary references, from Gatsby's all-consuming love for Daisy to Robert Frost's dark winter night and Sartre's exitless hell, resonated with you the most? What healing powers do poetry and fiction possess?
4. What version of Josh emerges from Natalie's memories of him? What were your impressions of him? What legacies does he leave for Kai?
5. If Natalie's fairy godmother showed up in your fantasies, what problems would she solve for you? What situations do you need extra nerve to conquer right now?

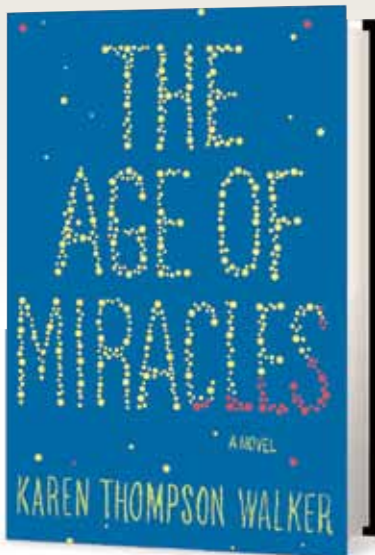
For more discussion questions visit www.ReadItForward.com

Karen Thompson Walker
**The Age of
Miracles:** A Novel

978-0-8129-9297-7 | \$26.00 | Random House | HC
978-0-385-67663-2 | \$29.95C | Bond Street Books | HC
📞 978-0-679-64438-5 | 📻 CD: 978-0-307-97071-8
📻 AD: 978-0-307-97072-5

READERS' ADVISORY:

With a voice as distinctive and original as that of *The Lovely Bones*, and for the fans of the speculative fiction of Margaret Atwood, here is a haunting and unforgettable debut about coming of age set against the backdrop of an utterly altered world. Lots of YA Crossover appeal.



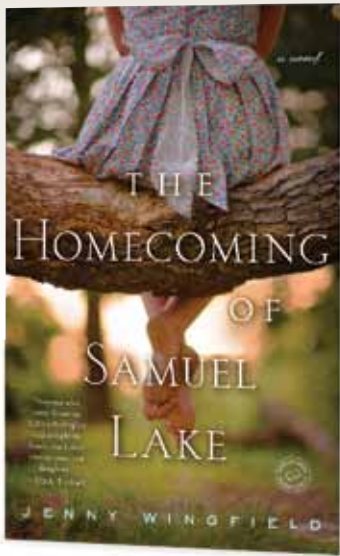
ABOUT THE BOOK:

On a seemingly ordinary Saturday in a California suburb, Julia and her family awake to discover, along with the rest of the world, that the rotation of the earth has suddenly begun to slow. The days and nights grow longer and longer, gravity is affected, the environment is thrown into disarray. Yet as she struggles to navigate an ever-shifting landscape, Julia is also coping with the normal disasters of everyday life—the fissures in her parents' marriage, the loss of old friends, and the hopeful anguish of first love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As readers, why do you think we're drawn to stories about the end of the world? What special pleasures do these kinds of narratives offer? And how do you think this element works in *The Age of Miracles*?
2. Julia is an only child. How does this fact affect who she is and how she sees the world? How would her experience of the slowing be different if she had a sibling? How would her experience of middle school be different?
3. How much do you think the slowing alters Julia's experience of adolescence? If the slowing had never happened, in what ways would her childhood have been different? In what ways would it have been the same?
4. Julia's father tells several crucial lies. Discuss these lies and consider which ones, if any, are justified and which ones are not. Is lying ever the right thing to do? If so, when?
5. How would the book change if it were narrated by Julia's mother? What if it were narrated by Julia's father? Or her grandfather?
6. Why do you think Julia is so drawn to Seth? Why do you think he is drawn to her?

For more discussion questions visit www.TheAgeOfMiraclesBook.com/Readers-Guide



Jenny Wingfield

The Homecoming of Samuel Lake:

A Novel

978-0-385-34409-8 | \$15.00/\$18.00C | RH Trade Paperbacks | TR

📖 978-0-679-60360-3

📻 CD: 978-0-307-73703-8 | 📺 AD: 978-0-307-73704-5

READERS' ADVISORY:

“Southern Gothic at its best . . .

puts one in mind of Erskine Caldwell
and Flannery O'Connor.” —Fannie Flagg

“[The] truest girl heroine this side of
Scout Finch.” —Susan Rebecca White

ABOUT THE BOOK:

Every first Sunday in June, members of the Moses clan gather for an annual reunion at a sprawling hundred-acre farm in Arkansas. And every year, Samuel Lake, a vibrant and committed young preacher, brings his beloved wife, Willadee Moses, and their three children back for the festivities. In the midst of it all, Samuel and Willadee's outspoken eleven-year-old daughter, Swan, is a bright light. Her high spirits and fearlessness have alternately seduced and bedeviled three generations of the family. But just as the reunion is getting under way, tragedy strikes, jolting the family to their core and setting the stage for a summer of crisis and profound change.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What would you sacrifice for your family? Did Toy do the right thing? Did Sam?
2. What purpose did Swan and Uncle Toy have to each other and to the other characters in the story?
3. In what ways does *The Homecoming of Samuel Lake* remind you of other Southern Gothic style literature? Give examples.
4. How does the character Swan Lake compare to Scout Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? How does Atticus Finch compare to Samuel Lake?
5. What role does the church play in the development of the story? Why does Swan wish that her father was anything but a preacher?
6. Explore the difference between the Moses' Truth and the Honest Truth. Both present their own challenges. Discuss how in the end the Honest Truth supports the Moses Truth.

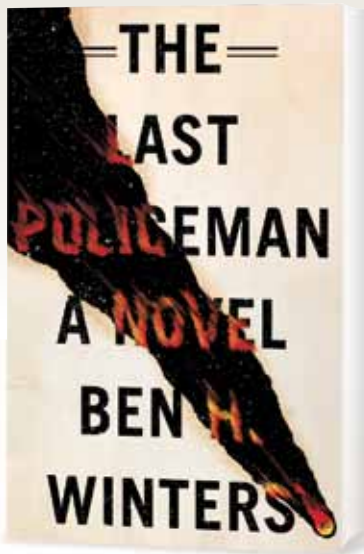
For more discussion questions visit www.RandomHouseReadersCircle.com

Ben H. Winters
**The Last
Policeman:**
A Novel

978-1-59474-576-8 | \$14.95/\$14.95C | Quirk Books | TR
978-1-59474-577-5

READERS' ADVISORY:

Great for mystery fans—a thoroughly intriguing police procedural (from an Edgar Award nominee). Great for science fiction fans—a wholly plausible end-of-the-world story. Great for anyone—what would you do if the world was going to end in six months?



ABOUT THE BOOK:

A police procedural set on the brink of an apocalypse. *The Last Policeman* is the first novel in a trilogy. Book 1 begins with six months left on Earth until an asteroid hits: What's the point of solving murders if we're all going to die soon, anyway? Hank Palace, a homicide detective in Concord, New Hampshire, asks this question every day. Most people have stopped doing whatever it is they did before the asteroid was discovered. But Hank Palace is working the case of Peter Zell, an insurance man who has committed suicide. To his fellow police officers, it's just one more death-by-hanging in a city that sees a dozen of suicides every week. But Palace senses something wrong. There's something odd about the crime scene. Something off. Palace becomes convinced that it's murder. And he's the only one who cares.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In *The Last Policeman*, civilization is grappling with its final days, and each individual is trying to figure out what to do. What would be the first thing that you would do, if it were announced that the world were ending in six months? Is there anything you've never said to someone, or something you've never done, that you would rush to accomplish?
2. A lot of people in the book have gone off to pursue their lifelong dreams, to experiment with drugs, or drop out of society. But in the main, Detective Palace tells us, "People are simply muddling along. Go to work, sit at your desk, hope the company is still around come Monday." How accurate do you find the vision of society in this fearful time; how accurate is the picture painted by the novel over all? Do you think the world would be more or less chaotic than Winters describes it?
3. Has there ever been a major change in the circumstances of your life—your own personal asteroid, so to speak—that caused a major change in the way you perceive the world?

For more discussion questions visit www.TheLastPoliceman.com

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- **Comment:** Post reviews of books, ask—and answer—thought-provoking questions, or give and receive book club ideas.
- **Connect:** Find an author on tour, visit our blog, or invite one of our hundreds of available authors to chat with your group on the phone.
- **Explore:** Find discussion questions, excerpts, author interviews, videos, free books, news on the latest releases, and more.

We're here to help readers
make the most of their book club experience.



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