

BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

The Nightingale by Kristin Hannah

1. The Nightingale opens with an intriguing statement that lays out one of the major themes of the book: “If I have learned anything in this long life of mine, it is this: In love we find out who we want to be; in war we find out who we are.” What do you think the narrator means by this? Is love the ideal and war the reality? How does war change the way these characters love? How does love influence their actions in the war? On a personal level, has love affected your life choices? Have those choices affected who and how you love?

2. Why do you think Kristin Hannah chose to keep the narrator’s identity a secret in the beginning and end of the novel? Were you surprised by who it turned out to be? Did you go back and reread the beginning of the novel once you finished? Were you satisfied when you discovered who was narrating the novel?

3. Many characters chose to construct a secret identity in The Nightingale. How did pretending to be someone else determine each character’s fate, for better or worse? And what about those who had no choice, like Ari and Julien?

4. The sisters Isabelle and Vianne respond to the war in very different ways. Isabelle reacts with anger and defiance, risking her life to join the resistance against Nazi occupation. Vianne proceeds with caution and fear, avoiding conflicts for the sake of her children. Who do you admire—or relate to, or sympathize with—more, Vianne or Isabelle? Discuss your reasons. You may choose to share your own stories and experiences as well.

5. Isabelle’s niece Sophie admires her aunt’s courage: “Tante Isabelle says it’s better to be bold than meek. She says if you jump off a cliff at least you’ll fly before you fall.” Do you agree? Is it better to take a risk and fail than never try at all? Do you think you could have acted as heroically as Isabelle under such horrifying circumstances? Who is more heroic in your mind—Isabelle or Vianne?

6. Each of the sisters experiences love in a different way. Vianne’s love is that of a mature woman, a wife and a mother devoted to her family; Isabelle’s love is youthful and impulsive, more of a girlish dream than a reality. How did Isabelle’s feelings of abandonment shape her personality and her life? How did Vianne’s maternal love lead to acts of heroism, saving the lives of Jewish children? How did love—and war—bring these two sisters closer together?

7. Take a moment to talk about Beck. Is he a sympathetic character? Did you believe he was a good man, or was he just trying to seduce Vianne. Did he deserve his fate?

8. When Isabelle works with Anouk and other women of the French resistance, she notices “the wordless bond of women.” What does she mean? Do you agree that women who come from different backgrounds but share a common path can create a silent bond with other women? Why do you think this is so?

9. Vianne recalls her husband Antoine telling her that “we choose to see miracles.” What does he mean by this? Is it his way of telling his wife he knows the truth about their son’s biological father? Or is it his way of looking at life, of coping with the terrible events they’ve lived through? Is seeing the beauty in the world an active choice? Is it possible to find miracles in our lives, if we look for them?

10. Discuss the scene in which Ari is taken away. What do you believe is the right answer in this situation—if there is one? What would you have done in Vianne’s position?

11. Do you think Julien had a right to know who his real father was? Would you have made the same decision Vianne did?

12. Finally, a show of hands: Who cried—or at least got a little choked up—while reading this book? Which scenes moved you the most? Which character’s fate would you say was the most tragic? The most poignant? The most harrowing? Did the book give you a better understanding of life under Nazi occupation during World War II? Did it move you, inspire you, haunt you? And finally, what will you remember most?



BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

The Soul of an Octopus by Sy Montgomery

1. Sy Montgomery writes about her scientific and emotional attraction to octopuses. Did anything surprise you in her poetic, sensuous language about the octopuses? Does she make clear what science cannot explain about octopuses?
2. How does Montgomery describe the different personalities that the octopuses have? Do you agree with her assessments of their attributes? Can you relate to the emotions that she interprets them to have?
3. Otherness is a central issue in the book – the otherness of the octopus and its dramatically different nature from other mollusks as well as the differences between cephalopods and people. How does Montgomery use the otherness of the octopus to show the ways the human characters in the story can feel that they don't fit in or belong? How do the human characters with their varied backgrounds find ways of coming together and belonging?
4. The similarities between octopuses and humans are another theme. What are the similarities that Montgomery sees? Would you share her point of view or do you see the differences more than the similarities?
4. What does Montgomery reveal about what constitutes consciousness, in humans and animals? Does she show that octopuses have consciousness?
5. Does Montgomery address and answer the question of whether an octopus can have a soul? If so, how does she show the animal has a soul? If not, does she explain that the animal does not have a soul?
6. What is anthropomorphism? Given what science knows now about the consciousness of animals, is anthropomorphism a problem? If so, why?
7. What are the issues involved in collecting wild octopuses from the oceans and studying them in an aquarium?
8. Many cultures consume octopuses as food. Do you see any issues regarding eating octopuses?
9. For a book that imparts a wealth of scientific information about octopuses, Montgomery uses humor and also a deep sense of feeling and respect for the octopus and all of nature. How does Montgomery convey the major conservation issues, such as global warming and the health of the oceans, in the stories she tells in this book about people and animals?
10. Has your view of human consciousness changed after reading this account? Has your view of animal consciousness changed? What information specifically influenced you?
11. Has your perspective on nature and on octopuses been influenced by this book? What views has the book reinforced and what views has it changed your mind about?



BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

The Lions of Fifth Avenue by Fiona Davis

- 1.** Laura Lyons, despite her husband's protests, wants to be a wife, a mother and a dedicated journalism student. Do you think women still face societal pressure today to only fill traditional roles? Do you think it's possible to "have it all"?
- 2.** The NYPL is very important to both Laura and Sadie. Is the library important to you? What role do you think your local library plays in your community?
- 3.** How does Sadie's character challenge stereotypes about librarians? Before reading this book, did you know the different roles they play in serving the public?
- 4.** How did going to the Heterodoxy club change Laura? Do you see similar organizations at work today? What is the importance of having spaces where women can voice their opinions, stories and plans for the future?
- 5.** What do you think of how Laura handles the situation after she finds out the identity of the book thief?
- 6.** Losing the only copy of his manuscript is a devastating blow to Jack. Do you think the act of burning the manuscript was justified? Why or why not? How do you think technology has changed the value we put on the written word?
- 7.** In her note, Laura writes that "it was all ultimately her fault, that her own actions initiated a cascade of tragedies." Why do you think Laura believes she is responsible? Do you agree? Would things have been different if so much responsibility in the home didn't fall only to Laura?
- 8.** At the trial, Sadie argues for a harsher sentence for the book thief because what was stolen was more than a number of pages worth a certain amount, but "pieces of Western history and culture that have a dramatic impact...the loss of these items is a detriment to all of humanity." Do you agree that the thief should receive a longer sentence? Given these items are priceless, do you think that locking them away is a viable solution? If not, why do you think it's important for the public to have access to these items?
- 9.** Why do you think Sadie was so closed off from people? In part, she used her grandmother's life as a justification for her own. What do you think finding out about Laura's real life did for Sadie?
- 10.** Laura struggles with her conflicting commitments to school and the Heterodoxy club. Do you think she did the right thing? Would you have done the same? Why do you think it was important to the women of the Heterodoxy club to keep their discussions private? Why wouldn't they want their ideas disseminated?



BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

Oil and Marble by Stephanie Storey

Suggested Discussion Questions written by the author (who is "I")

1. When I first started talking about the book, readers were surprised that Michelangelo and Leonardo lived at the same time — was anyone at your book club surprised? Did everyone know they lived at the same time? Why DON'T we know this about these two most famous artists?
2. Discuss the differences between Michelangelo's relationship with his family and Leonardo's — and how that affected their lives and art.
3. Discuss the Author's Note in the end about which parts of the book were based on the historical record and which parts were imagined. Did you like the balance or did things bother you (Insider tip here: I've had several people tell me they were HEARTBROKEN that the bird ring was imagined).
4. I always love hearing people talk about how each artist affected the other in the book. Do you think we would have Michelangelo without Leonardo and vice versa and why?
5. I feel like we are living in an era that is ripe to create another Michelangelo or Leonardo. I think we are living in a "New Renaissance." Do you agree? Why/why not?
6. Who do you relate to more, Michelangelo or Leonardo and why?
7. Our society/history, puts artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo up on a pedestal/out of reach... Oil and Marble tries to make them HUMAN. Discuss their human struggles and flaws and personalities in this novel and how that element of humanity in these artists improves your experience of their art.
8. Who has seen the Mona Lisa and the David in person? What was the experience like; did reading this novel change that experience in retrospect, why?
9. These two artists create their art very differently — discuss their different creative processes and how their art is a product of their approach. How did their temperaments affect their process and their art?
10. Mona Lisa's smile... Was the "reason" given for her smile fulfilling and why or why not (I definitely only suggest discussing this one if everyone has read the book!)
11. What have Michelangelo and Leonardo taught you about creativity and success?
12. This question works for either book: do you think great artists like Raphael, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci achieved what they did primarily because of their talent or because of hard work?



BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

All the Missing Girls by Megan Miranda

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story in reverse? Did you like or dislike it? How did the reverse telling of the story affect your interpretation of the situation and your assessment of the characters therein?
3. Nicolette Farrell initially does not want to return to Cooley Ridge. What is her experience of homecoming like? What seems to be the same about the town and the people in it and what seems to be different? How has Nicolette changed or not changed since her time growing up in Cooley Ridge?
4. Who is responsible for what happened to Corrine Prescott and Annalise Carter? Why?
5. How are the victims of each disappearance treated? How do the people in town react to their disappearances? What roles do reputation, gossip, opinion seem to play in the investigations?
6. Everett says that people can change, but Nicolette seems to believe that people do not change in any substantial way. Does the book ultimately suggest who is right? Do you agree?
7. What lies do the characters tell, and why do they tell them? Do you feel that any of the lies were justified? What role does perspective seem to play in the determination of what is true and what is not?
8. Nic says about Corrine, "Everyone had two faces and she looked deep into us until she found it." What did you think about Corrine? Why do you think she acted the way she did?
9. What does Nicolette reveal about Corinne that gives us insight we might not otherwise have? How does this point of view—and the point of view of the other characters—shape or influence your assessment of Corinne's fate?
10. Evaluate the theme of memory in the book. Are the memories of the characters reliable? Why or why not? What does this suggest about the way that time influences our perspective and how the past affects our future? Since the majority of the action takes place in Nicolette's memory, how does the author create suspense and tension?
11. Were you surprised by the conclusion of the book? Why or why not? How did your opinion of each of the characters change by the story's end? If you could change the ending, what would you do to make it better?
12. Megan Miranda has written several other books and series. Will you read any of them?



BOOK CLUB IN A BAG QUESTIONS

One Day in December by Josie Silver

1. Both Laurie and Jack seem to believe in love at first sight. Do you believe in it? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Laurie couldn't bring herself to tell Sarah that Jack was the man from the bus? What would you have done if you were Laurie?
3. Despite trying to keep their distance, Laurie and Jack couldn't deny their mutual attraction for each other. And also, Sarah pushes for the two of them to become friends. When did it become apparent that it wasn't just mutual physical attraction but emotional, too?
4. Dissatisfied with her job and feeling guilty for kissing Jack, Laurie decides to leave it all behind and go to Thailand for a bit. Why was this the right choice for her? Would you have done something similar if you were in her situation?
5. She meets Oscar in Thailand and while she can tell he comes from a different background and lifestyle from her, they still have an instant connection. But the Oscar of Thailand is different from that of the one in London, who is much more serious and put together. Why do you think people become a different version of themselves in vacation? Why do you think it's hard to remain that way (the more relaxed version) once back in the real world?
6. Do you think Laurie truly loved Oscar or was it more the comfort he provided?
7. Why didn't Jack and Sarah last? How did his accident change him?
8. Right before Laurie and Oscar's wedding, Laurie accidentally reveals that Jack is the bus guy. Sarah is extremely upset and refuses to attend Laurie's wedding. Do you think her reaction was extreme since they had broken up? Or do you think her feelings of betrayal were warranted?
9. With Sarah's absence, Jack fills in to give the speech. How did his speech define his love for her? Were you surprised that Oscar didn't try to talk to Laurie about it?
10. Eventually Sarah and Laurie make up, why do you think Sarah decided to forgive her?
11. Let's talk about how much Laurie, Jack and Sarah changed from the beginning of the story until the end.
12. At the end of the story, Laurie asks Jack what might have happened if he got on the bus. He says: "Boy sees girl. Girl sees boy. Boy gets on the bus, kisses girl's face off, and they live happily ever after." How do you think their love story would have played out differently if he got on the bus?
13. Did you have any doubts there would be a happy ending? Did you like the ending? What's next for those two love birds?

