



The Heroine's Book Club
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Lizzie Bennet, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

1. Though the book ends in a famous marriage, Jane Austen herself never married. Does knowing about her marital status affect your enjoyment of the book? How does it inform your reading of *Pride and Prejudice* and its observations about the state of marriage?
2. Lizzie's encounter with Lady Catherine de Bourgh is one of literature's most satisfying showdowns. What does Lizzie have in common with her future aunt?
3. Jane Austen often uses counterpoint to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of her heroines. What do Lizzie's sisters reveal about her character?
4. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." What other "universally acknowledged" truths does Jane Austen explore in *Pride and Prejudice*?
5. Though Lizzie participates in country-dances and wears Empire-waist gowns, her self-assurance and confidence are decidedly modern. In which ways is Lizzie a modern heroine? In which ways does she reflect her own times?

Janie Crawford, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston

1. Stormy weather is a recurring theme in this book. How does Janie's faith bring her through a literal and figurative hurricane?
2. Zora Neale Hurston was living in Haiti when she wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Do you think this setting informed her story? Why or why not?
3. Discuss the book's title. What is its significance?
4. Silence and noise both play a vital role in the book's narrative. How does Janie take advantage of both?
5. One of the book's most appealing facets is its portrayal of the love match between Janie and Tea Cake. How is this relationship informed by those that came before it?

Anne Shirley, *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery

1. Why does Anne insist on spelling her name with an "e"? What does this say about her personality?
2. Maud Montgomery famously struggled with depression. Are those struggles reflected in *Anne of Green Gables*? If so, how?
3. Discuss Anne's relationship with her "bosom friend," Diana. What do the friends have in common? What challenges do they face?
4. Though Anne adopts Green Gables as her true home, she brings plenty of herself to Prince Edward Island. What does Anne contribute to Marilla, Matthew, and her community at large?
5. Anne is an inherently happy character obsessed with tragedy. Discuss Anne's preoccupation with tragedy and melodrama and its contribution to the book's narrative.

Celie, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

1. Throughout the novel, Celie's physical and figurative dignity is threatened and restored. List some of the challenges faced by Celie's dignity. How does she fight to reclaim it?
2. Alice Walker spent years working as a civil rights advocate in the segregated South. How is this work, and her childhood as a sharecropper's daughter, reflected in *The Color Purple*?
3. Celie's female friendships are as transformative as they are tumultuous. Discuss females as friends and enemies in *The Color Purple*.
4. Since its publication, *The Color Purple* has been subject to challenges and bans. Why was (and is) the book so controversial?
5. What does Celie's language say about her character?

Francie Nolan, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith

1. Betty Smith goes to great lengths to describe the meeting and courtship of Francie's parents, Katie and Johnny Nolan. Why? How does this description inform the rest of the book?
2. What ties bind Katie and Francie? What ties alienate them?
3. Betty Smith worked for the Federal Theater Project and other WPA/New Deal agencies during the 1930s. How is her work on behalf of the working-class poor reflected in her novel?
4. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* can be characterized as a coming-of-age novel. Pinpoint a particular moment or moments at which Francie "comes of age."
5. "How wonderful was Brooklyn, she thought..." Brooklyn is as much a character of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* as the Nolans. Discuss its role as a family member in the novel.

Claudine, The Claudine Novels by Colette

1. Though penned by Colette, Willy initially took credit for the Claudine novels. Can you find his influence in their pages?
2. Claudine's indulgences begin at a young age. Find and discuss examples of physical and emotional indulgence in *Claudine at School*.
3. Colette was a famous cat lover. Discuss the role of Fanchette in the Claudine novels.
4. Does Claudine love or hate authority? Discuss the role of dominance and authority in Claudine's relationships.
5. Are the Claudine novels scandalous today? Discuss whether literary scandal can withstand the test of time.

Scarlett O'Hara, *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

1. How is the sweep of the Civil War and Reconstruction reflected in Scarlett's own fight to survive?
2. Margaret Mitchell was famous for her wit and charm. Find an example of her humor in her epic novel.
3. Is Scarlett an appealing character or not? Is she the main character of the novel or is Melanie (as indicated by Margaret Mitchell)?
4. It's easy to highlight the ways in which Scarlett is not like her mother, but she is haunted by Ellen O'Hara throughout the novel. In which ways, if any, does Scarlett resemble her mother?
5. Though Scarlett's resolve at the end of the book is strong, opinions on its final outcome vary. Do you think Scarlett gets her man? Why or why not?

Scout, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

1. Why does Harper Lee choose to tell her story through Scout's eyes?
2. Though *To Kill a Mockingbird* was an instant literary sensation, author Harper Lee has chosen to stay out of the spotlight for most of its publication history. Do you agree or disagree with this decision? What question would you ask Harper Lee if you could interview her?
3. Compassion is a central theme of Lee's novel. Discuss Scout's changing relationship with compassion throughout the book.
4. What is Scout's real name? What does her nickname suggest about her character...and is that suggestion borne out in the book?
5. Atticus Finch is famous for changing the perspective of Maycomb (and his daughter) in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Does Scout ever change Atticus's mind?

Laura Ingalls, *The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

1. Though Laura is encouraged to adhere to strong gender roles, these roles are often subverted by her need to help Pa and her family. Discuss blurred gender lines in *The Long Winter*.
2. Is the Ingalls family simple by choice or necessity? Discuss the virtue of simplicity in the book.
3. Though the walls never break down under the strain of blizzard after blizzard, the Ingalls family is not so lucky. Discuss each family member's breaking point.
4. Laura Ingalls Wilder's relationship with her daughter, Rose, was fraught with arguments and difficulties. Discuss mother-daughter relationships in *The Long Winter*.
5. What kinds of entertainments get the Ingalls family through the long winter? What, if any, are their modern-day equivalents?

Jane Eyre, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë

1. Jane's steadfastness leads her to what is right, but it also separates her from the man she loves. Is Jane's steadfastness positive or destructive on the whole?
2. Though she made her heroine rootless and lonely, Charlotte Brontë herself was fiercely attached to her family. Discuss family ties (and the lack thereof) in *Jane Eyre*.
3. At the time of its publication, *Jane Eyre* was subject to wild speculation as to the author's gender. Is the book "women's fiction" or not? Why?
4. How are Jane's emotions reflected in the landscape around her?
5. Discuss Jane's role as governess. How does it serve as a literary device? Is there power or only humiliation in her subservient role?

Jo March, *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott

1. Louisa May Alcott wrote *Little Women* for the sake of her finances (and on a tight deadline). How are work and money described in the book?
2. Though Jo bashes against the barriers of traditional femininity, in many ways she stays a "little woman." Discuss gender roles and restrictions in the novel.
3. Though the book has been lauded as a portrayal of positive sisterly relationships, it in fact shows many struggles between siblings. How do sisters fight in *Little Women*? What, if anything, do these struggles add to Alcott's narrative?
4. Discuss the men of *Little Women*. Are they central or peripheral to the book's narrative power?
5. Is Jo a heroine or an anti-heroine? Why or why not?

Mary Lennox, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett

1. By the time she wrote *The Secret Garden*, Frances Hodgson Burnett had suffered grave personal tragedies. How do sorrow and nostalgia inform Burnett's narrative?
2. Mary Lennox's growth is reflected in that of her "bit of earth." Find parallels between Mary and her garden.
3. Frances Hodgson Burnett is known for writing *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, a book that famously idealizes childhood. Does *The Secret Garden* idealize children? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the role of magic in *The Secret Garden*. Is magic an external force or an internal one?
5. Though Burnett writes about the garden as a hideaway from the world, she herself was a worldly woman known for her affairs, divorce, and very public lifestyle. Discuss the intersection between public and private worlds in *The Secret Garden*.



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