

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Dennis Bock's novel **The Ash Garden**

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the
hardcover edition of **The Ash Garden**. All information taken from
other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for **The Ash Garden** has been prepared
and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box.
Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker and writer.
Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic
literature intended for book club discussions, educational study
seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the
Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for The Ash Garden

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Dennis Bock's The Ash Garden

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

The guide is formatted to give you extra space to make your own notes.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your bookclub.

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more 'hands-on' support, feel free to contact us. (See Contact Information)

What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.

Do We Need to Agree?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences with us. You can respond on-line at our website or contact us through our Contact Information. We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a bookclub discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)

- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote. (not necessarily from the novel)
- Discuss the historical information of the novel. (not applicable to all novels)
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the bookclub-in-a-box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

Above All, Enjoy Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

Novel Quickline

Author Information

Historical Information

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. Dennis Bock wrote *The Ash Garden* to investigate the morality behind the creation and use of the atomic bomb to end America's war with Japan.

Discuss this issue in relation to the viewpoints expressed by Robert Oppenheimer and by Anton.

Two Quotes:

"I have no remorse about the making of the bomb and Trinity (code name for the first atomic test). That was done right. As for how we used it, I understand why it happened and appreciate with what nobility those men with whom I'd worked made their decision. But I do not have the feeling that it was done right. The ultimatum to Japan was full of pious platitudes ... our government should have acted with more foresight and clarity in telling the world and Japan what the bomb meant." (Oppenheimer)

"With the bomb, ideas of right and wrong ceased to exist. To be a principled human being doesn't mean you pay lip service to right and wrong. That's too easy ... I do not have scars on my face. I do not deny the pain caused that day, and every day after that ... But this is what I know. I know the world requires a certain payment from us all, pain and suffering ... for the freedoms we enjoy. We have all paid. Or will. It is not right or wrong to have used the bomb. But it was necessary." (Anton, p.203)

2. Dennis Bock believes in asking “big” questions, some of which are listed below, but he does not necessarily answer them.

Consider how Bock use his characters, novel structure, and writing style to explore these questions? Does he succeed?

3. Decision-making involves choosing between alternatives, and Bock does not let his characters off the hook when it comes to the conclusions they have come to, especially when the choice involves selecting the lesser of two evils.

What is the best way to make a decision – fact or emotion? If a decision has destructive consequences, as we see in the novel, how does the decider live with the results of the choice and what is his/her responsibility to the victim?

3. Anton says to Emiko: *“Who you are is because of me.”* (p.261)

Consider how we define ourselves both through our actions and through the situations in which we find ourselves or that we create for others.

4. There is a small number of characters in the novel in contrast to the complex number of issues Bock presents.

If one character could represent the conscience of the novel, who would it be?

- **Emiko**, the lonely and long-suffering victim with the face that reproaches America’s decision to drop the bomb?
 - **Sophie**, a victim of the actions of another political system that devastated families and cultures and who negotiates a difficult truce between Anton and Emiko?
 - **Anton**, the scientist who believed that his work after the war – i.e., speaking on behalf of nuclear safety – would eventually help heal the world?
 - **Grandfather**, the bent and distraught old man, who blamed no one but was able to move on and ask for help for Emiko?
-

5. The novel's language is raw and unadorned. At times, the thoughts are represented by the simplest of words and sentences.

Why has the author chosen to write his story in this way?

Novel Quickline

We meet Anton, Emiko, and Sophie many years after the war. Emiko, now a documentary maker, is a child victim of the bombing of Hiroshima. Anton, the subject of Emiko's documentary, is a German national who defected to the West to become part of the team responsible for creating the atom bomb. Sophie, Anton's wife, is an orphaned Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. These three people, all victims of war, are situated in the quiet country of Canada, at a time of relative peace in the world.

The Ash Garden discusses the responsibility of decision-making: how one decides to choose between two evils and if it is possible to live with the choice.

The Ash Garden eerily reflects the timely issues that face us today. In fact, it made its U.S. debut on September 11, 2001. It was on that date that the world was thrust once again into a position of decision-making. The novel's opening image of Emiko watching the bomb fall is familiar to anyone who incredulously watched the planes on September 11 smash into the World Trade Center towers.

We waited for some time watching in a sort of excited trance ... I marveled as a dark round object ... was released from the plane's belly. (p.5)



**Thanks for previewing this
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in
print or PDF format, just visit:**

www.bookclubinabox.com/discussion-guides