

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES JONATHAN FRANZEN'S NOVEL

THE CORRECTIONS

1-866-578-5571

BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

INFO@BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Jonathan Franzen's novel The Corrections

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

This discussion companion for *The Corrections* 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 Corrections

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections*

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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

Keys to the Novel

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. One key to this novel is Franzen's use of satire and black humor.

Discuss examples like Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (a Holocaust film) in relation to the novel. Is black humor a tool that readers find comfortable and/or effective when considering serious social and life issues?

2. Franzen touches on a wide variety of topics in his novel: the influence of mass media, world economics, graft, greed, the stock market, internet, research and development, drugs, and more.

Has he gone in too many directions? Do his many references to social, political, and economic issues add or detract from his focus on the personal journeys of his characters?

3. Franzen's book is littered with so many literary, philosophical, and metaphorical references that it would be hard to single out any one reference. Instead, we can look at the title for the clue to his central thesis – the idea of corrections.

The term, corrections, refers to acts that have already been completed, but in the novel, it is clear that there is still much correcting to be done.

What does the title mean to you? Begin with Franzen's list of possible "corrections" and add to it. (see *Correctness*, p.32)

4. The novel's characters are caricatures of human characteristics and are named in ways that reveal these characteristics.

Discuss your initial reactions to each of the characters and their lifestyles. Do you feel sympathy? Intolerance? Affection? Distance?

5. Franzen's experience with Oprah generated a lot of discussion and shock at the time.

What was he trying to achieve? Did his goals match the outcome?

6. In an interview with *Atlantic Monthly* in October 2001, Franzen takes exception to the popular description of the Lambert family as dysfunctional.

Considering Franzen's allusions to Tolstoy and his quote from Anna Karenina, what is the nature of family life that Franzen portrays in this novel? Is "dysfunctional" an appropriate description of this family?

7. On page 466, Alfred has an important question but cannot remember what it is. On page 553, Alfred decides that the important question is "*How to get out of this prison?*" There are prisons of all kinds made by both the body and the mind.

How does Alfred's question relate to Franzen's themes? Is this the question that Alfred meant to ask?

8. The Corrections was published just days before September 11, 2001. In his novel, Franzen looks at the timely issue of economic collapse through Chip's sideline story of Lithuania. While both incidents drastically changed people's outlook and reactions, clearly Franzen did not know what was about to happen. (See *Novel Quickline*, p.9)

Is there a sense of "preview" in this novel of what may yet come in the world? Are novelists, filmmakers, and artists more visionary than the ordinary reader/viewer? How can we effectively use their forward-looking perspective?

9. Yet Franzen explains in an interview that he chose not to *"develop the big stories that would comment on the world."* (see *His Style*, p.13, Weich quote)

Do you think he is commenting on the world through his depiction of the many things that have an impact on the lives of his characters?

10. Franzen likes to compare his novel to one of the century's classics – Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*.

Is this comparison a valid one? Discuss the thematic and structural approach of both novels and consider other novels or movies that fit the same genre.

Novel Quickline

The Corrections tells the story of a middle-American middle-class family of five: Enid and Alfred together with their three children – Gary, Chip, and Denise. As parents, Enid and Alfred have struggled to keep the family's feet firmly on the middle ground of functional family life: no better or worse than any other family. However, rebellion is an inherent and stereotypical quality in this American family's relationships, each member with one another and with the external world. Throughout the novel, the now adult children try to pull away from the tug of parental influence. Despite their efforts, they find themselves drawn back, continually and involuntarily, into the parental sphere of influence.



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

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