

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES FRANCES ITANI'S NOVEL

DEAFENING

1-866-578-5571

BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

INFO@BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

**THIS PDF GUIDE IS NOT FOR
DISTRIBUTION OR RESALE.**

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

**Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the
discussion companion for
Frances Itani's novel**

DEAFENING

Published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., Toronto. 2003.
ISBN: 0-00-200539-5

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

This discussion companion for **Deafening** 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 Deafening

ISBN 10: 1-897082-17-7

ISBN 13: 978-1897082-17-1

This guide reflects the perspective of the Bookclub-in-a-Box team and is the sole property of Bookclub-in-a-Box.

2005 BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

2007 2ND EDITION

Unauthorized reproduction of this book or its contents for republication in whole or in part is strictly prohibited.

CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Frances Itani's Defeating

READERS AND LEADERS GUIDE	2	Descriptive Language	36
INTRODUCTION		SYMBOLS	
Suggested Beginnings	7	Dream	41
Novel Quickline	9	Fire Story	42
Keys to the Novel	10	Sunday Book	42
Author Information	10	Rope	43
Inspiration for the Story	12	Circle	43
CHARACTERIZATION		Crockery Bag	44
Grania	17	Hands	44
Jim	18	War	44
Grania's Parents	19	LAST THOUGHTS	
Mamo	20	Novel's Accomplishments	49
Tress and Kenan	21	Deaf Culture	52
Fry and Colin	21	American Sign Language	53
FOCUS POINTS AND THEMES		Cochlear Implants	54
Sound and Silence	26	Deaf and Dumb	55
Loss and Coping	27	Spanish Flu	56
Push and Pull	27	Sunday Book	56
Cues and Clues: Common Elements	29	FROM THE NOVEL (QUOTES)	59
WRITING STRUCTURE AND STYLE		ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	71
Setting	33		
Narrator	35		

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. The subject of World War I has long been overshadowed by World War II in both film and fiction, but, in recent years, books like Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*, Jane Urquhart's *The Stonecarvers*, and others have brought the subject to the public's attention. As the voices of the survivors begin to dim forever, novelists like Itani are recreating the thoughts and words that were once withheld by the soldiers too tired and too overwhelmed to share.

Deafening highlights the soundless world of the deaf versus the constant noise of battle. Consider how language may actually deafen understanding and communication on many levels. Consider this thought in connection to the few remaining veterans.

2. Sound and silence are the novel's major themes. As metaphors, sound and silence reflect the experiences shared by the deaf and by survivors of war.

Consider these metaphors in connection to the novel's characters – Grania, Jim, Mamo, and Kenan. What do sound and silence mean to each of them?

3. Through Jim's friend, Irish, we understand that everyone has a story waiting to be told. Itani tells the story of battle – in the world of deafness and in war. She attempts to create a powerful comparison for readers so that they may gain insight into two worlds that the majority of us have not experienced.

Has Itani succeeded? Has she given new insight and information about the deaf and about war?

4. Although Itani's detailed and accurate research is limited to the era in which her story takes place, she plants the seeds for the future emergence of Deaf Culture and discusses the controversy of teaching the deaf to sign and/or to speak – manual methods versus oral. Today, the basic arguments over method still exist, but science has made significant but controversial progress through cochlear implants, which allow some deaf people to receive sound through electronic impulses to the brain. (see *Cochlear Implants*, p.54)

Considering this progress, how would Grania have been affected by cochlear implants? Would she have used them? How would her friend, Fry, or Jim, or Mamo feel about this innovation?

5. Given her challenges, Grania is portrayed as an extremely capable, strong, forthright, and determined individual.

Has Itani presented Grania realistically? Consider the main characters in the novel – are they balanced, or are they examples reflective only of the novel's themes?

6. Itani has done a masterful job of paralleling the struggles and challenges of war and deafness, without creating a heavy or depressing comparison.

Taking into consideration the experiences of both Grania and Jim, is there anything Itani missed or spent too much time on?

Novel Quickline

The time is 1902 and the setting is rural Canada. Grania, our protagonist, a victim of scarlet fever, is made deaf at the age of five, an age when she would have begun to learn to communicate with the wider world around her. As a result, Grania is isolated from a world that she had only just begun to understand. There is help available but Grania's mother has difficulty accepting it because she is influenced by the culture of guilt and shame of her time. Her solution is to ignore Grania's situation in the hope that one day it will right itself and Grania will no longer be deaf.

Grania's grandmother, Mamo, is more pragmatic and recognizes that Grania will not succeed solely on the skills learned at home. She pushes for Grania to be sent to the school for the deaf in Belleville, where she must learn to live away from her loving family, and from her sister, Tress, with whom she shares a secret language. At school, Grania learns both sign language and speech, as well as other skills, which help her deal with the outside hearing world.

Grania meets and falls in love with Jim, a young hearing man from the east coast of Canada. Her life seems complete, but the war soon tears them apart and sweeps Jim into the worst of experiences – trench warfare. At the Western Front, Jim is tested to his limit as he and the other stretcher-bearers retrieve the shattered bodies of their comrades. With only letters back and forth from Ontario to the war front, Grania and Jim attempt to communicate their love in a brutal and fragile world.

Itani's book is a poetic story of overcoming obstacles, surviving differences, and is a tribute to the power of language in all its many forms.



**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