

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

**Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the
discussion companion for
Muriel Barbery's novel**

The Elegance of the Hedgehog

Novel published by Europa Editions,
New York, 2008.

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

This discussion companion for *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert 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.

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*

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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.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your book club.

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.

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. You can contact us via our website (www.bookclubinabox.com), by email (info@bookclubinabox.com), or by phone (1-866-578-5571). We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a book club 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

Novel Quickline

Keys to the Novel

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Renée is a 54-year-old, overweight, unattractive widow who has been the concierge at 7 rue de Grenelle for 27 years. Paloma Josse, a 12-year-old intellectual prodigy, is the daughter of a rich and prominent family, tenants in the building. Each spends her days at this “*fine hôtel particulier*” (p.19), considering the mysterious ways of the upper class and pondering what life is worth. The philosophical quest that is principal in the minds of both women is a search for beauty.

Renée cares for the building, has tea with her friend Manuela, reads, watches foreign films, listens to music, and talks to her cat. Paloma fills her diaries with daily observations and theories, all the while planning to commit suicide on her 13th birthday unless she finds a reason to stick around.

When Kakuro Ozu moves into the building, taking over the deceased M. Arthens’ 4th floor home, Renée and Paloma formally meet. In their search for life’s *raison d’être*, M. Ozu helps shine a light on both of their paths.

notes

Keys to the Novel

Setting

- With the story set in a very wealthy apartment complex in Paris, we are instantly treated to a unique social perspective and agenda. The characters are the invisible occupants who hide behind the doors, worried about how they will be seen by others. When the doors are closed, there is an appearance of uniformity and stereotype. Inside the walls of the separate homes are the distinct beliefs and opinions of the individuals. Opening the doors changes everything. (see **Renée**, p.16 and **Ozu**, p.20)

Narrative Structure

- The novel chronicles moments, thoughts, and happenings in the parallel narratives of Renée and Paloma. Through them, the novel takes aim at social generalizations, stereotypes, and misconceptions. Each woman has her own special perspective, based on personal history and background, and each tries to work through that perspective in order to grow and develop. The different ages of Renée and Paloma are an important consideration. (see **The Female Voice: Young and Old**, p.46)

Perception

- The novel is as much about self-discovery as it is a forum for discovering, or uncovering, the truths about the lives of others. This would include stereotypes and misconceptions.
- Paloma's narrative, developed through her journal entries, allow her



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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