

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Matt Cohen's novel Elizabeth and After

Novel published by Vintage Canada, 1999, a division of Random House of Canada, Ltd. ISBN: 0-676-97257-8

Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of *Elizabeth and After*. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion was written by Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed. She is the founder of Bookclub-in-a-Box and an international speaker with more than 30 years experience as a teacher and school librarian. 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.

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This guide reflects the perspective of the Bookclub-in-a-Box team and is the sole property of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Guide originally published in 2005.

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Matt Cohen's *Elizabeth and After*

READERS AND LEADERS GUIDE	2	Adam's Biblical Notes	48
INTRODUCTION		The Novel's Structure: Triangle	50
Novel Quickline	7	SYMBOLS	
Keys to the Novel	8	Cars	55
Author Information	9	Photographs	57
CHARACTERIZATION		LAST THOUGHTS	
Elizabeth McKelvey	15	Identity: Cohen and His Characters	63
William McKelvey	18	Suggested Beginnings	65
Carl McKelvey	19	FROM THE NOVEL (QUOTES) . .	71
Adam Goldsmith	21	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.	79
Luke Richardson	23		
Ned Richardson	23		
Fred Verghoers	24		
FOCUS POINTS AND THEMES			
Family & Home	29		
Chance, Choice, and Fate . .	32		
Elizabeth and After	35		
The Importance of Love . .	36		
Love's Legacy	38		
WRITING STYLE AND STRUCTURE			
Cohen the Writer	43		
Realism	45		

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 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

Elizabeth and After is concerned with the life and death of Elizabeth McKelvey — wife, mother, lover, and schoolteacher. The book starts dramatically with Elizabeth's death. Looking back at her relationships, the novel explores how the life and death of one person can bind together and influence the lives of others both through day-to-day living and in memory. The story, spanning four generations, is a tapestry woven from the guilt and regret of three specific men — William, Carl, and Adam — over Elizabeth's death. Her memory invokes strong emotions in each; they all feel abandoned without her.

The narrative thread follows the tormented and broken Carl, Elizabeth's son, as he returns home from a long exile. Injured by a history of physical abuse and alcohol abuse, Carl returns to redeem himself to the young daughter he deserted more than a decade earlier following his divorce from Chrissy.

notes

In the small town of West Gull, everyone knows everything about everyone else, so Carl's battle is both personal and public. The various players in the town become intertwined with Carl's story and embroil Carl in their own plots. In the process, we learn about Elizabeth — her life and death — through her son, her husband, and her lover. In the course of the story, we also learn about other families in town in terms of their own tragedies, romances, and the diverse skeletons in their personal closets.

Keys to the Novel

Characters *their struggle for self-possession and individuality*

The characters in Cohen's works are ordinary people discontented with their lives and with society. They are typically burdened by life inside a physical shell that has been battered and abused psychologically or physically. Their struggle is their attempt to realize their potential and to re-establish their identity without destroying themselves in the process. They have yet to realize that life holds a variety of possibilities with choice as the key.

Elizabeth and After differs from Cohen's other more dispassionate novels. It is this novel that is acknowledged as his most emotional love story. The unusual nature of the love Cohen portrays in this book is not the love of one character for another. It is a love story about the enduring nature of relationship to other people and to life itself.

Family *its struggle for validation*

In the novel, we find that the family dominates and controls the individual in both a positive and a negative way. The family gives the individual his/her identity and should, therefore, be a central force in its preservation. But the family's identity can sometimes obscure the essence of the individual and thus destabilize or weaken it. Cohen's characters have forfeited their youth before they have had a chance to experience it fully and



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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