

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES NANCY HUSTON'S NOVEL

THE MARK OF THE ANGEL

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Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Nancy Huston's novel **The Mark of the Angel**

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

This discussion companion for **The Mark of the Angel** 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 Mark of the Angel

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Nancy Huston's *The Mark of the Angel*

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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

Historical Background

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

Nancy Huston's book deals with historical events that took place in the 1960s. Taking into consideration your group's reactions to the novel, begin with any or all of the following questions.

1. In this novel, Huston's narrative style is up close and very personal and, therefore, may be somewhat uncomfortable or annoying. For an accomplished writer like Huston, this is a very deliberate method of storytelling.

Discuss the purpose and effectiveness of this style in the context of your group's individual responses.

2. One of Huston's primary concerns is how to look at a specific event or situation from both a historical and a personal perspective. She has chosen three very different victims of World War II (the most famous and best-documented event of the twentieth century) and has set them against the French-Algerian conflict, a conflict that has been virtually ignored by the media and by the world.

Through her characters' actions and emotions, Huston shows how personal perspective has an impact on how a specific event or situation is viewed and considered. Consider this in light of recent significant historical events.

3. Andras's shattering experiences as a Jew in the Holocaust do not prevent him from sympathizing and aiding others in need – the Algerians.

Is he the exception or the rule? Do his sufferings entitle him to special sympathy? At what point can we stop sympathizing with Andras? ever? never?

More Questions

Should history be viewed with facts/statistics or with subjective and personal perception? Can a fictional piece of writing deal accurately with real events? Why did Emil die? Is it human nature to visit the sins of the father (or mother) upon the child?

How effectively has Huston presented the French/Algerian conflict and its issues? How sympathetic are you to Saffie, Andras, and Raphael? What are your sympathies for Rachid?

What does it take to prompt people to take action on behalf of others? Are we the keepers for our brothers and sisters? Why, after five thousand years of recorded human history, are we still asking the same question as Cain?

Does destiny play the only role in our lives? Was it Saffie's destiny to meet Andras? Was it Raphael's choice to bring harm to Emil? Do we have any choice or control over our future?

Against what measuring stick are we to judge the behavior of the characters in the novel?

Novel Quickline

In the aftermath of World War II, Saffie, an orphaned German national, leaves Germany and comes to France. Her wartime experiences have left her emotionally empty and lifeless, but she goes through the motions of survival. In Paris, she applies to work as a maid for Raphael, a native-born French musician, who falls crazily in love with her. He marries Saffie and together they have a son, Emil. When Raphael sends Saffie to Andras to repair his flute, he sets in motion a love affair that has disastrous results for everyone.

Nancy Huston presents a romantic triangle against the backdrop of the French-Algerian conflict of the 1950s and 1960s. Andras, a Holocaust survivor, becomes intensely involved on the side of the Algerians in their fight for independence. Saffie is unaware of the conflict because she is so psychologically drained from her own wartime experiences that it takes all her effort to just exist day to day. Raphael is indifferent because he is never quite sure what all the political fuss is about. To him music is the only thing that really matters – that is until love (Saffie) comes into his life.

In an interview Huston once stated that she wanted to know how close one has to be to a person or event in order to care about someone else's destiny and to get involved. By exploring the actions and reactions of these three characters, Huston asks questions relating to intervention and responsibility. These are the questions asked by victims everywhere: Europe (Jews), Rwanda and other African countries, Bosnia – just to name a few.



**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:**

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