

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES ERIN MORGENSTERN'S NOVEL

THE NIGHT CIRCUS

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Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Erin Morgenstern's novel The Night Circus

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Random House, 2011.

Novel's ISBN: 978-0-385-67171-2

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

This discussion companion was written by Rona Arato and Laura
Godfrey. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction
and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educa-
tional study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information
about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

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Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*

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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 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 Yourselves

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Key to the Novel

Author Information

History of Magic

History of the Circus

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Le Cirque des Rêves—the circus of dreams—is a magical place that enchants visitors and performers alike. Arriving without notice, it slips into town and is only open from dusk until dawn. The circus is a fantastical compound of black-and-white striped tents, each holding a unique and breathtaking marvel. Yet beneath the surface of this shimmering entertainment paradise seethes a mysterious force: the force of magic, both real and illusory.

Celia and Marco have been raised to perform magical feats: Celia by Hector Bowen, her magician father who performs as Prospero the Enchanter, and Marco by the mysterious man in the grey suit, who plucked him from an orphanage to train in the arts of magic. Unbeknownst to Celia and Marco, they are pawns in a bet made between the two aging magicians; contestants in a challenge only one can survive. And when they fall in love, they must figure out how to overcome the diabolical plans that have been laid out for them. As they search for a way out of their deadly predicament, they set off a chain of events that threatens the lives of everyone connected to the enchanting circus they hold so dear.

notes

Key to the Novel

The key to understanding and enjoying this magical novel is its setting: the circus. It is a place that captivates the magic of the reader's imagination. At Le Cirque des Rêves, there are spectacular and ingenious ideas inspired by human dreams, desires, and hopes. Nothing is beyond the realm of imagination; everything is possible.

In place of the traditional three-ring performance areas, this circus has many individual tents, each dedicated to a single enchanting feat. The acrobats, conjurers, contortionists, and fire artists are out of the ordinary. In addition, we are given clocks that include the things mentioned above; an eternal bonfire that never goes out; an Ice Garden where everything is white, sparkling, and very cold; a Wishing Tree, where new wishes are added to existing ones by lighting a white candle with another; and a Cloud Maze, where the top cannot be seen, because it is open to the stars.

The magic of Morgenstern's circus is about taking a leap of faith, like Bailey must do to get down from the Cloud Maze. This novel wants the reader to leap into his or her innermost secret thoughts and enjoy the magic of that spontaneous freedom:

Bailey only hesitates for a moment and he resists the urge to close his eyes as he leaps. Instead he laughs as he tumbles through the air.

Reaching the pool of spheres below is truly like falling into a cloud, soft and light and comforting.

(p.202)

The beauty of Erin Morgenstern's delightful book is in her ability to transport her readers out of their everyday world and into one of fantasy and imagination. The novel functions precisely as does the idea of Le Cirque des Rêves. People are always seeking to step out of the ordinary world and experience the extraordinary.

Has Erin Morgenstern succeeded in this? Why or why not?

notes

Author Information

- Erin Morgenstern is a writer and visual artist. She was born in 1978 and grew up in Marshfield, Massachusetts, the daughter of an elementary school teacher and an accountant. She attended Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she studied theater and studio art. She graduated in 2000, and now lives in New York City with her two cats.
- Her debut novel, *The Night Circus*, began as a project for National Novel Writing Month in 2005, though she has said the first draft was so rough it didn't even include Celia as a character yet. Morgenstern continued to work on it sporadically for five years, and after being rejected by 30 literary agents, she signed with Inkwell Management, who then sold her book to Doubleday (an American publisher owned by Random House).
- Film rights for *The Night Circus* were quickly sold to Summit Entertainment, the company that created the Twilight saga movies, and they are reportedly working with David Hayman, who produced the Harry Potter series. However, no release date has been announced yet.
- *The Night Circus* was published in 2011 and became one of that year's most successful books, spending seven weeks on the *New York Times*' Bestseller List—all the more impressive as this is Morgenstern's first piece of published work. Her book was inspired by a number of sources, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Prestige* (both the Christopher Priest novel and the 2006 film), Roald Dahl, Charles Dickens, and Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*.
- In an interview with *Chatelaine* magazine, Morgenstern says she was always interested in magic, but employs a loose definition of the word: "I'd stretch the term magic to cover a great deal of things, from rabbits in hats and card tricks to tarot and astrology and gut feeling and premonitions." She explains that she is interested in "extraordinary things."
- Morgenstern's vision of a circus is different from the typical three-ring Barnum & Bailey model. In the *Chatelaine* interview, she states that she



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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