

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES ANDREA LEVY'S NOVEL

SMALL ISLAND

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Andrea Levy's novel Small Island

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

This discussion companion for **Small Island** 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 Small Island

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Andrea Levy's *Small Island*

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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

Author Information

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. *Small Island* is a novel about some big themes found in current literature – for example, racism, intolerance, and bigotry. Levy’s perspective comes from the stories of individual people and their history. She is interested in cultural conflicts from the points of view of all who are affected.

Into what category would you place Levy’s novel? Consider the factors presented in the book – intolerance, courage, cultural environment, education. Are there other factors that could be included?

2. Levy uses humor rather than drama to show racial tension between the blacks and the whites in her novel. The story of the segregation of black American GIs was a true situation that Levy found through her research. The British had no idea or experience in dealing with this form of racism, so they tried to accommodate all requests.

Compare British and American racism as it is presented by Levy. Did she succeed in portraying the evils of bigotry with her humor?

3. Levy has structured this novel around four narrative voices, each of which represents a different aspect of the social divide.

Are these voices balanced? Does one voice stand out from the rest, and why? Who do you think is Levy's favorite or most interesting character?

4. The adjective "small" plays a significant role in Levy's novel because it not only describes the two islands – Jamaica and Britain – but it addresses the people, their dreams, and their perspectives. In addition, many of her characters are physically small.

Consider all sides of this concept in relation to the themes and the characters in the novel.

5. Levy feels that the immigration process not only changes those who have immigrated to a specific country, but it also profoundly affects the people who have accepted those same immigrants into their midst.

Discuss this idea in light of the characters presented in this story.

6. Queenie's baby is life's circle complete and brings together the past and the future.

Is this ending satisfactory and/or optimistic? As a mother, how can Queenie give up her child? Has she made a reasonable decision to ask Gilbert and Hortense to raise her baby? Consider the implications of each character's response to this issue, including Bernard's.

Novel Quickline

Small Island is the delightful story of Jamaican immigration to post-war Britain in the days before England's predominantly white population began to show a visibly different demographic profile. While England was struggling to get back on her feet, she was suddenly overwhelmed by an influx of loyal Jamaicans and other colonials who had fought on Britain's behalf during the war, alongside Britain's own servicemen. Using their British

notes



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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