

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NOVEL

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Virginia Woolf's novel To The Lighthouse

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

This discussion companion for **To the Lighthouse** 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.

Assistance for this project was provided by Ramya Jegatheeson and Nuzhat Khurshid. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for To The Lighthouse

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

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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. Mrs. Ramsay dies suddenly in the middle of the night. Neither readers nor any other characters, except her husband, witness her death.

Why does Mrs. Ramsay have to die? Had she lived, would James have reached the lighthouse? What does he gain/lose by having to wait ten years?

2. Woolf feels that relationships between men and women are fluid and have characteristics that flow back and forth between them. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay have such a relationship.

Discuss the other male and female characters in the story.

Who are their counterparts? What is the successful or unsuccessful nature of these relationships?

3. Virginia Woolf looks at transcendence in terms of overcoming obstacles in order to achieve one's goals in life.

Consider each character and his/her goals in the context of Virginia Woolf's outlook on achievement and recognition.

4. On page 273, Lily Briscoe is quoted as saying, “*She wanted him.*”

In addition to Mr. Ramsay, what else might Lily Briscoe want? Why has she chosen to want him now? Consider the other men whom she considered (or hadn't) earlier in the story.

5. There have been more critical commentaries written about Virginia Woolf than about any other person or event in recent history.

Why is she so fascinating? How much more can be said?

6. Virginia Woolf feared becoming a stereotype.

Have iconic phrases such as “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” placed her in that exact stereotype position? Discuss what the phrase implies about Woolf. After reading *To The Lighthouse*, do you agree that Virginia Woolf, the author, is to be feared or revered?

7. Virginia Woolf’s social circle included the rich, the famous, and the about to be famous.

Is she to be considered a writer for the elite only? Can she connect with other social classes?

8. Using the relationship of madness and genius as a measure, discuss Virginia Woolf.

If medication had successfully managed her illness, what effect would that have had on her writing? Would she have been satisfied?

Novel Quickline

To The Lighthouse is Virginia Woolf’s favorite and most autobiographical novel. Like all of her other writings, it is simply about people: their needs, desires, and accomplishments.

The novel’s setting is based on her family vacation home in Cornwall, England, where she and the rest of the Stephen family spent happy childhood summers doing many things and interacting with a great many guests.

The story begins with the Ramsay family on vacation together with a wide array of companions. The plot concentrates on James Ramsay's desire to go to the lighthouse, a trip discouraged by Mr. Ramsay owing to the threat of rain. This first section spans a single afternoon and evening.

Part two of the novel is set ten years later and brings Mr. Ramsay, Cam and James (without the now deceased Mrs. Ramsay), Lily and Mr. Carmichael, back to the summerhouse. The final section completes the first: the expedition to the lighthouse is finally achieved.

Keys to the Novel

Virginia Woolf, herself, is the key to all her novels, but most especially this one. (see *Author Information*, p.11) Her characters, the novel's timeline, and the setting highlight Woolf's powers of observation and her appreciation of people. They all emphasize her views on the creative process, its relation to mind and thought, and her positive perception of how the nature of life transcends death.

Powers of Observation and Appreciation of People

- Virginia Woolf was an observant, sensitive, and intuitive thinker. One of her observations was that although women represent half of the human species, they did not write great philosophical theories nor were they looked to for their views on life, science, or political dynamics.
- In Woolf's time, there were not enough female role models to fashion herself after, so she began to form her own thoughts, ideas, and philosophies about men and women, about life, knowledge, power, and politics.



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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