

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES ANN-MARIE MACDONALD'S NOVEL

THE WAY THE CROW FLIES

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Ann-Marie MacDonald's novel The Way the Crow Flies

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

This discussion companion for **The Way the Crow Flies** 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 Way the Crow Flies

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Ann-Marie MacDonald's *The Way the Crow Flies*

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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

Key to the Novel

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

Ann-Marie MacDonald's book has a complete story line and fully developed characters. A good place to begin a discussion is with your group's reactions and with the following questions.

1. All the characters, especially Jack, Simon, Fried, and Bradley, claim the boundaries of their jobs as defense for their actions.

What constitutes these boundaries? Under what conditions can this defense be accepted?

2. Claire is the murder victim, but it appears that everyone in the story is victimized in some way.

Discuss this statement.

3. The way the plot develops we are led to assume that Claire was murdered by Mr. March.

If the truth about his abuse of the girls had come out, and had he been arrested and tried in place of Ricky, would we, as readers, have been satisfied? Would this have been justice?

4. At the end of the novel (p. 709-712), Colleen accepts both Madeleine's visit and her story. Forgiveness is not stated or implied in their conversation, nor is there any hint of antagonism in either Ricky or Colleen.

Is this a realistic outcome for such tragic events?

5. Along with the statement "*it takes a village to kill a child*" (p.579), there are multiple references to the Disney song, "It's a Small World."

Discuss these two ideas in the context of the novel's plot.

6. Consider the relationship between assumption and truth. In *The Way the Crow Flies*, there are instances of both. For example, MacDonald uses the story of the Bay of Pigs as a metaphor for assumptions and its consequences.

Can we rely on assumptions in order to reach the truth? Should assumptions ever be made? Is it possible to never make assumptions?

7. Consider the cliché "forgive and forget" in connection to Ann-Marie MacDonald's extensive use of clichés in the novel and her view of the history of the time.

Can "forgive and forget" be applied to other historical tragedies?

8. Discuss the political, social, and judicial relationship of Canada to the United States, both in terms of 1962 and today.

Does MacDonald deal with this in the novel? If so, how?

9. In murder trials today, the availability of DNA as evidence makes the judicial system more accountable.

What could have been put into place at the time of Ricky's (Truscott's) trial to prevent the sequence of assumptions that led to conviction?

Novel Quickline

In the aftermath of World War II there existed a period of both rebuilding and relative calm, which was cheered on by the appearance of picture-perfect families on TV and by magazines that offered helpful domestic hints guaranteed to create model households. The world appeared to offer open-ended adventures promised by such songs as “Moon River” and “Qué Sera, Sera.” Flying in on these wings of peace, the McCarthy family returned to Canada from Europe in order to live out the new dream.

The sun came out after the war and our world went Technicolor. Everyone had the same idea. Let's get married. Let's have kids. Let's be the ones who do it right. (p.3)

In her novel, **The Way The Crow Flies**, Ann-Marie MacDonald presents the McCarthy family as an ideal: a perfect icon for the optimism of the post-war era. Jack, the father, is handsome in his uniform; Mimi, the mother, looks like a movie star. The children, Mike and Madeleine, are remarkably well behaved and reasonably pleasant to each other. For Jack, his family and their lifestyle represent “*the best of all worlds.*” (p.6)

Against this backdrop, MacDonald also gives us a glimpse into another world, a parallel one veiled behind the façade of the Cold War. In this world, the concerns are great, involving secret operations, spies, and decisions carried out in the name of progress and peace.

With the space race and the Bay of Pigs invasion, American president Jack Kennedy found himself in a position where he had to make decisions fraught with secrecy and hidden motives. The novel's Jack finds himself in a similar situation, involving intrigue and lies. Ann-Marie MacDonald explores how easy it is to do the wrong thing despite honorable intentions, and how simple it is to make bad decisions that may have tragic and unforeseen consequences either for a few or for many people.



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

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