

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S NOVEL

ANIL'S GHOST

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Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Michael Ondaatje's novel Anil's Ghost

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the hardcover edition of *Anil's Ghost*. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for *Anil's Ghost* 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 Anil's Ghost

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*

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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

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. Despite the fact that there are six major characters in Anil's Ghost, no single character takes the stage; instead all six share the spotlight. Consequently, every character's perspective is taken into consideration and given equal weight in the search for truth.

What perspective does each character bring to this search? And what role does truth play in war?

2. In writing Anil's Ghost Ondaatje has chosen not to pass judgment, or seek the origins of the conflict. Instead he chooses to focus on the human face of war.

Do the relationships in the novel offer a commentary on war? Is Ondaatje proposing a potential solution through these relationships?

3. Anil goes through great pains to change her name and to keep it in its masculine form.

What does this tell us about her character?

4. By appealing to the reader's senses, Ondaatje immerses us in his novel.

What role do the senses play in seeking truth and in confronting and understanding war?

5. **Consider the significance that each character, especially Sailor, has in relation to the themes of the novel.**

6. **What is the significance of the book's title?**

Novel Quickline

West meets East in this beautifully written book about Sri Lanka. Anil Tiserra, born in Sri Lanka but educated in the West, returns to her homeland with a job to do. As a forensic anthropologist, she is sent by an international human rights group to uncover the identity of those responsible for the organized mass murders of innocent civilians. These deaths were frequent, unexplained occurrences during Sri Lanka's civil war, in which there aren't two but three sides: the government, the Tamil rebels from the north, and another group of independence seekers from the south.

Although Anil brings her mostly Western perceptions with her to Sri Lanka, she must rediscover the parts of her Eastern identity in order to fully understand the difficult political and human situation she encounters there. With one foot in each hemisphere, Anil finds that it takes much emotional effort to bridge the gap between the two. **Anil's Ghost** is a search for truth, identity, and perspective, and we are invited to join in that search with Anil.

She meets and works with two brothers, Sarath and Gamini, and through them learns about the complexities of the ongoing civil war. She develops a unique relationship with one victim of the conflict – a nameless body she calls Sailor. From the other characters in the book she learns about her country’s glorious history, its beauty – both physical and poetic – and its strength of character.

Michael Ondaatje has given a human face to a complicated political event that does not often surface in the Western news media but nevertheless is still current. He feels we should know about it and succeeds in giving us an intimate and detailed human picture of the costs and pain of civil war.

Keys to the Novel

Senses

- While many novelists rely on the reader’s intellect to decipher the message, Ondaatje’s masterpiece of a novel simply bombards our senses. It is only when we are immersed in the sight, touch, smell, and feel of Sri Lanka that we really understand it. Ondaatje reaches for the truth in this novel through our sensations, not simply our sensibilities. When we see, we bear witness; when we speak, we identify; when we touch, we understand the dimensions of what we are asked to believe. The famous trio of monkeys who hear no evil, see no evil, and speak no evil comes to mind. We, of course, are not monkeys, but we are being asked to pay close attention. Anil is seeking the truth, and the novel’s rich language allows us to pursue that truth right alongside her.



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

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