

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion guide for Abraham Verghese's novel **Cutting For Stone**

Published in paperback by Vintage Canada, a division of Random House, Toronto 2010. Original copyright, 2009.

ISBN: 978-0-307-35778-6

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

This discussion companion for *Cutting For Stone* 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.

This guide was co-written by Carol Verburg. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for Cutting For Stone

(PRINT) ISBN 13: 978-1897082652

(E-PUB) ISBN 13: 978-1897082669

(E-PDF) ISBN 13: 978-1897082676

This guide reflects the perspective of the Bookclub-in-a-Box team and is the sole property of Bookclub-in-a-Box.

©2010 - DE - BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX - TORONTO, CANADA

Unauthorized reproduction of this book or its contents for republication in whole or in part is strictly prohibited.

CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Abraham Verghese's Cutting For Stone

READERS AND LEADERS GUIDE	2	Belonging, Foreignness	37
INTRODUCTION		Missing	39
Novel Quickline	7	Challenge, Fear, Courage	40
Key to the Novel, Setting	8	Teams, Individuals	41
Author Information	11	Regret, Redemption	42
Background Information	13	WRITING STYLE AND STRUCTURE	
Ethiopia	13	Narration	47
Eritrea	14	Framing Device	48
Carmelite Order	17	Plot	48
Saint Teresa	18	Style	49
Saint Thomas	19	SYMBOLS	
CHARACTERIZATION		Blood	50
Names	23	Stone	51
Sister Mary Joseph Praise	24	Dance	52
Thomas Stone	24	Holes	53
Marion, Shiva	25	Transplant	53
Hema	25	Slippers	54
Ghosh	26	LAST THOUGHTS	
Genet, Rosina, Zemui	27	Healing vs. Curing	59
Others	28	Suggested Beginnings	60
FOCUS POINTS AND THEMES		FROM THE NOVEL (QUOTES)	67
Cutting for Stone	34	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	77
Conjoinment, Separation	34		
Love, Betrayal	36		

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 Yourself

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

Key to the Novel

Author Information

Background Information

INTRODUCTION

Novel Quickline

When Thomas Stone describes the “*cavernous tangle of blood vessels in the cortex*” (p.634) of his son Shiva’s brain, he could be describing the story of his family and, in turn, this novel. Like the cerebral cortex itself, this story draws power from the intricate, convoluted way it folds in and out and over itself.

Characters appear, disappear, and reappear in new contexts; a seemingly minor incident may change everything, while an apparent catastrophe seems to change nothing. Since the narrator, Dr. Marion Praise Stone, is writing as a surgeon at Missing Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where he was born fifty years ago, we know at least part of his story’s outcome. Yet the fast-paced plot remains suspenseful right up to the end. What we don’t know is why Marion needs to “*heal the rift that separates my brother and me*” by telling their story. (p.9)

His starting point is his own and his brother’s unexpected birth, which kills their mother, a nun. The babies’ presumed father, Missing Hospital’s chief surgeon, panics and disappears.

notes

Another doctor, Hema, cuts the “*short fleshy tube*” (p.115), joining the twins at the head, revives them, and brings them up in partnership with Missing’s remaining surgeon, Ghosh. The ripples from political events at the palace of Emperor Haile Selassie often rock the hospital compound and those around it. Like ShivaMarion (as the twins think of themselves), their country is growing up. When Marion is accused of involvement in the Eritrean rebellion, he must flee to the United States. There his path crosses his missing father’s, and overlaps again with Shiva’s. The novel’s themes of insider vs. outsider, connection vs. separation, and love vs. betrayal re-erupt to pull the scattered family together in a life-and-death climax.

Key to the Novel

The Setting

A hospital

- A hospital is a crossroads for birth and death, injury and healing. Almost all of this novel takes place in and around two hospitals: first, Missing Hospital in Addis Ababa, then Our Lady of Perpetual Succour in the Bronx, New York. (see *Missing*, p.39)
- Missing Hospital is also the intersecting point between science and religion — both the Christian religion of its founders, and the traditional local beliefs of many of its African patients and staff.

“... the commonest complaint in the outpatient department was “Rasehn...libehn...hodehn,” literally, “My head...my heart...and my stomach ... this was how stress, anxiety, marital strife, and depression were expressed in Ethiopia ... psychic distress was projected onto a body part, because culturally it was the way to express that kind of suffering.” (p.157)



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

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in
print or PDF format, just visit:**

www.bookclubinabox.com/discussion-guides