

# BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE  
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES HOWARD JACOBSON'S NOVEL

# THE FINKLER QUESTION



# **BOOK CLUB IN A BOX**

## **Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Howard Jacobson's novel The Finkler Question**

Paperback novel published by Bloomsbury, New York, 2010.

Novel's ISBN: 978-1-60819-611-1

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

This discussion companion was written by Samantha Bailey and Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed. Herbert is the founder of Bookclub-in-a-Box and an international speaker with more than 30 years experience as a teacher and school librarian. 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 Finkler Question**

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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 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](http://www.bookclubinabox.com)), by email ([info@bookclubinabox.com](mailto: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 Yourselves**

# **INTRODUCTION**

**Novel Quickline**

**Keys to the Novel**

**Author Information**

# INTRODUCTION

## Novel Quickline

Julian Treslove is mugged and robbed of his wallet, pen and cellphone. He is shocked and unable to grasp that he, Julian, could ever be a robbery target. Trying to make sense of the situation, he decides that it is a case of mistaken identity—that really, the thief mistook him for Sam Finkler, his Jewish friend. That would constitute a more definitive motive for the hold-up.

Julian reaches this conclusion because he has no distinctive physical appearance. Although very good-looking, he is so non-descript that people have trouble identifying him and sometimes take him for Brad Pitt or Colin Firth. He has no inner identity, and so Julian might be forgiven for trying to find one as a Jew. After all, his two close friends (Finkler and Libor) are Jewish. Not wanting to be forever on the outside looking in, Julian decides to join them.

This latest turn of events gives him the opportunity to band together with his friends as a fellow Jew.

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## Keys to the Novel

*The Finkler Question* cannot be called a light read. Rife with philosophy and intricate thought in every word, the satirical story evolves as its characters evolve. Howard Jacobson uses loss, identity crisis, and grief to make sense of anti-Semitism and to discuss the Jew's place in the world. The title *The Finkler Question* really refers to heavily prejudicial and long-debated concepts surrounding the "Jewish Question." Also considered is who has permission to talk about these things and whether there can be an answer.

Were a reader to understand this book without its brilliant use of satire, the entire concept would be lost. There are some who believe that Jacobson is anti-Semitic, despite being Jewish, when in fact, the opposite is true. His philosophical subtext, subtle humour, symbolism, and masterful turns of phrase resonate even more when the reader realizes that each of the characters is a parody of those who debate the Jewish Question. Treslove, Finkler, and Libor each embody differing thoughts, beliefs, and actions in order to address the negative stereotypes surrounding Jews, Zionism, and Israel.

## Author Information

- Howard Jacobson was born on August 25, 1942, in Manchester, England. A native of Manchester's Jewish Ghetto, Crumpsall Park, he was brought up in Prestwich and attended grammar school in Whitefield. His garrulous father was a taxi driver, upholsterer, market auctioneer and children's magician. The entire family was involved in the selling of goods at market stalls, but ultimately, no one in his family was remotely successful in business.
- His doting mother, very reserved and quiet, read him poetry as he was growing up. His family was completely secular, yet they were upset when he married out of the faith.





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

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