

**BOOK
CLUB
IN A BOX**

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES PETER CAREY'S NOVEL

**TRUE
HISTORY
OF THE
KELLY GANG**

1-866-578-5571

BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

INFO@BOOKCLUBINABOX.COM

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Peter Carey's novel True History Of The Kelly Gang

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of **True History Of The Kelly Gang**. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for **True History Of The Kelly Gang** 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 Sharoni Sibony. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for True History Of The Kelly Gang

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Peter Carey's True History Of The Kelly Gang

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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

Author Information

Historical Background

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. When the media first revealed that Peter Carey was working on a book about Ned Kelly, some critics became angry because they felt he was glorifying a murderer. Carey, however, saw Kelly as a people's hero, a man who stood up to the state officials – the law enforcers and the judges – and fought for the rights denied him.

Whose point of view do you agree with after reading Carey's novel?

2. **Do Ned's motivations ultimately justify his actions? Should we judge Ned, or any man, by his actions or by his thoughts and emotions, by the circumstances of his life?**

3. There is a Native American proverb that states: *"You cannot help but love a man once you've heard his story."* Ned's story convinces Mary.

Does it convince you? Is there any danger in being thus persuaded?

4. From the title onward, Carey sets us up to question the truth of Ned's account.

Can there (or should there) be such a thing as objectivity, or is objectivity just a myth?

5. Think of reporters who claim to be objective but who choose which details to report and which to leave out.

Can they ever be absolutely objective? Should we expect them to be?

6. In today's world, perhaps we lack role models. There are numerous negative models of behavior from drug-taking athletes to corrupt politicians. We rail against these negative role models, but we are also very drawn to them and their exploits, as we are to Ned.

What is it about them that draws us?

7. Carey was first appalled and then intrigued that Kelly has become an acceptable role model for Australian youth.

Compare Kelly's legendary status with other heroes or anti-heroes, past or present.

8. As you think about the novel, consider how each of us views family, friend, and foe. Consider how our personal views affect our perspective.

Is it possible to trust Ned's perspective on the people in his life?

9. **Given Ned's family history, could his life have followed a different path?**

10. **Were their lives a waste, or did the Kelly Gang achieve something noble and notable?**

11. Ned discusses how he killed his heifer at a very young age. Today we often hear that violent behavior toward animals can predict later violence against people.

How do you think this episode of Ned's life fits into the pattern of events that he describes?

Novel Quickline

True History Of The Kelly Gang recounts in his own words the life story of Australian outlaw-turned-hero Ned Kelly. Ned is the eldest of several children born of an Irish convict father and a mother to whom he is devoted. When he is twelve, he loses his father, and his mother secures a farm under the Australian Lands Act. This keeps his family impoverished on a permanent basis. The novel dwells on Ned's youth, his apprenticeship with the legendary bushranger Harry Power (who is also one of Ellen Kelly's many lovers), and his initiation into a life of crime from which he can never return.

Carey recreates the loyalty and friendships among the members of the infamous "Kelly Gang," depicting them as young, naïve men who get caught up in a life of crime despite themselves. The last years of Ned's life, those for which he is most famous, are told in a more hurried fashion as Ned's story races toward its inevitable conclusion – his eventual capture and hanging at the age of twenty-five.

Carey has said that *"if we allow ourselves to think of [Ned] as a growing boy we can permit him to be human,"* not strictly heroic. (McCrum) Indeed, in Carey's novel, Ned becomes fully human as Carey explores his emotions and motivations and the society that has created him. He may live by violence, but he has a softer side that Carey shows us on repeated occasions. Ned merely wants to work the land and be left alone; he never intends to become involved in a life of crime.

Carey allows Ned to justify his own actions, and thus he offers a justification for an entire country that celebrates these actions. Ned stands up to the corrupt, unjust penal system, defending the people's rights, and thus he becomes simultaneously loathed and loved, a legend revered beyond his time.



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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