

This reading group guide for *The Book Club* includes an introduction, discussion questions, and ideas for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

## **Introduction**

On the surface, it is a monthly book club. But for five women, it is so much more. For Eve Porter, whose husband's sudden death cheats her of every security she had planned on, the club is a place of sanctuary. For Annie Blake, a brilliant attorney intent on starting a family late in life, it is the chance to finally let down her guard and dream of other possibilities. For Doris Bridges, it is her support group as she acknowledges her dying marriage and finds the ultimate freedom in her husband's betrayal. For Gabriella Rivera, the "perfect" wife, mother and friend who offers support to everyone but is afraid to ask for it herself, it is a sense of community. And for Midge Kirsch, an artist who has always lived her life against the grain, it is a haven of acceptance.

They are five women from different walks of life, embracing the challenge of change. And as they share their hopes and fears and triumphs, they will hold fast to the true magic of the book club—friendship.

## **Topics & Questions for Discussion**

1. The books, poems and verses selected for each chapter were chosen by Monroe to structure the novel around the "Book Club" theme. How does the selected book or poem at the chapter heading influence the action within the chapter?
2. In Chapter 16, the women offer several reasons why they think Doris might be depressed. How well does the reader know Doris by this point? Have you recognized these symptoms in women you know?
3. Midge states to the club, "I'm not sure it's always a good thing to confront friends." Yet, Midge is indirectly confrontational with barbs and humor. Discuss various forms of confrontation between the friends in this book.

4. Women are traditionally acknowledged to be skilled in making and sustaining relationships. How do the relationships between the women of the club effect their individual relationships with husbands, children, and loved ones?

5. Throughout the novel, the books the women read in the club influence them. Cite examples. Do you find this to be true in your life? After Annie's surgery, the group wants to choose a book to help Annie through her upcoming struggles. How can books promote growth and healing? What do you think of the club's desire to read and discuss the Bible? 6. "She heard the calling in her heart, in her soul, in every fiber of her being." This describes Eve in chapter nine: *The Call of the Wild*. Discuss the calling Eve hears?

6. Annie tells Doris in Chapter 14, "So many women give, give, until they have nothing left. Then one day they wake up and look in the mirror and don't know their own reflection." Later in the book, Doris remembers this statement and looks into the mirror (Chapter 16). Describe her reaction to her own reflection at this important turning point. Doris refers to this statement again in her letter to the book club (Chapter 18). How has the character grown and evolved in the time between these references?

7. "Now she was left to regret having lost the opportunity to find that young man again in the middle-aged one, the dreamer she'd fallen in love with." Do you think Eve's is a common observation for women who have been married for many years?

8. In chapter 16, *The Awakening*, Eve states, "I believe that all women have these little epiphanies all throughout their lives." Do you agree and if so, discuss what these epiphanies are.

9. In Chapter 16, Doris is alone with herself and "the yellow wallpaper." Later, she feels that "she wasn't running away from anything, except perhaps the yellow wallpaper." This refers to a short story written in 1892, *The Yellow Wall-Paper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This story powerfully traces a woman's descent into madness. How can a woman's home become a prison rather than a sanctuary?

**10.** Three heroines from classic novels are discussed by the book club in Chapter 16: Emma from *Madame Bovary*, Anna from *Anna Karenin*, and Edna from *The Awakening*. What tragic ending did these three women share? Discuss the similarities and disparities between their situations and the choices each of them made. How did the social and moral conventions of their time period influence their choices? Might their choices have been different had these women lived in the 21st century? Consider Doris's choice in the lake in light of this discussion.

**11.** The characters we care most about are often those we identify with most. Which character did you identify with? How did the characters' flaws bring them to life as much as their goodness?