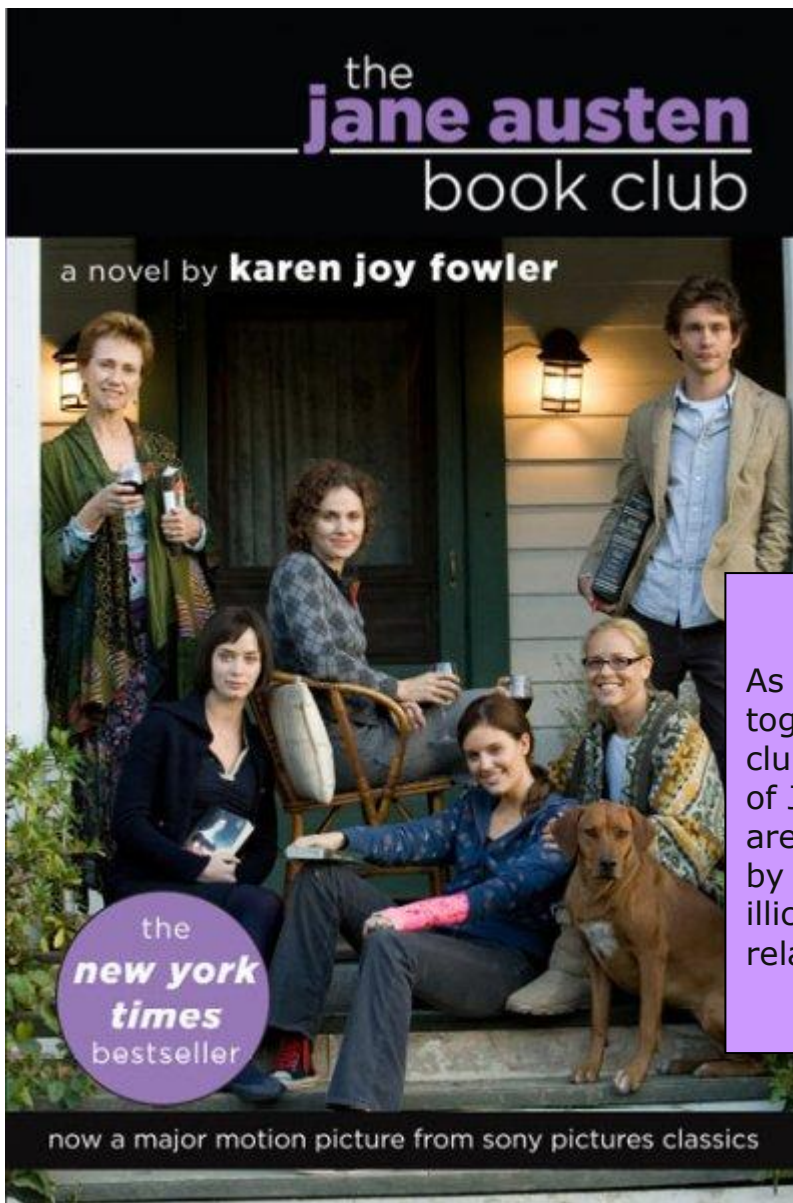


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1308874>

About the Book



As six Californians get together to form a book club to discuss the novels of Jane Austen, their lives are turned upside down by troubled marriages, illicit affairs, changing relationships, and love.

About the Author Source: *Biography Resource Center*
<http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Winner of a 1987 Hugo Award for best new writer, Karen Joy Fowler is the author of short-story collections and novels that use fantastical characters and situations to bring to light various aspects of human nature. Her works, including *Artificial*

Things, *Sarah Canary*, and *The Jane Austen Book Club*, have been well received by critics. Fowler has also received the World Fantasy Award for *Black Glass: Short Fictions* and a Nebula Award for her short story "What I Didn't See."

Fowler was born in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1950. Her mother, a schoolteacher, and her father, an animal behaviorist at Indiana University, encouraged a love of reading in their children. As the author stated on her Web site, "The day I got my first library card there was a special dinner to celebrate." Though Fowler greatly loved Bloomington, her parents longed to return to southern California, where they were raised. When Fowler was eleven, her family moved to Palo Alto, California, which greatly disappointed her. "Palo Alto was much more sophisticated than Bloomington," she recalled. "At recess in Bloomington we played baseball, skipped rope, played jacks or marbles depending on the season. In Palo Alto girls my age were already setting their hair, listening to the radio, talking about boys. I considered it a sad trade."

After graduating from Palo Alto High School in 1968, Fowler attended the University of California, Berkeley, majoring in political science. She also became active in the antiwar movement, where she met her husband, Hugh Fowler, a free-speech advocate. The couple married in 1972, the same year Fowler earned her bachelor's degree. Both attended graduate school at the University of California, Davis, and while finishing her master's degree, Fowler gave birth to her first child. Her second child was born less than two years later, and, as the author told Elisabeth Sherwin in the *Davis Enterprise*, "I began to feel that I should have a life when the children left." On her thirtieth birthday, Fowler decided to try her hand at writing. To give herself time to write, she negotiated a one-year contract with her husband, but after meeting with little success, she had to renegotiate a five-year contract. "I did manage to come in under the five-year mark by several months, and the rest is history," she told Sherwin.

Reviews

Booklist *Starred Review*

Fowler, a captivating and good-hearted satirist, exuberantly pays homage to and matches wits with Jane Austen in her most pleasurable novel to date by portraying six irresistible Californians who meet once a month to discuss Austen's six novels. Coyly shifting points of view, Fowler subtly uses her characters' responses to Austen as entree into their poignant and often hilarious life stories. The book club is Jocelyn's idea, a fifty-something gal who seems to prefer the company of her show dogs to men. She has known Sylvia since grade school, and even used to date Sylvia's husband, who has abruptly moved out, inspiring their beautiful, accident-prone, lesbian artist daughter, Allegra, to move back in and join the book club along with her mother. Also on board are disheveled and loquacious Bernadette; Prudie, a high-school French teacher; and Grigg, the only man. Fowler shares Austen's fascination with the power of stories, and explores the same timeless aspects of human behavior that Austen so masterfully dramatizes, while capturing with anthropological acuity and electrifying humor the oddities of our harried world.

Fellow Austenites will love Fowler's fluency in the great novelist's work; every reader will relish Fowler's own ebullient comedy of manners, and who knows how many book clubs will be inspired by this charming paean to books and readers.

Publishers Weekly

Fowler's fifth novel (after PEN/Faulkner award finalist *Sister Noon*) features her trademark sly wit, quirky characters and digressive storytelling, but with a difference: this one is book club-ready, complete with mock-serious "questions for discussion" posed by the characters themselves. The plot here is deceptively slim: five women and one enigmatic man meet on a monthly basis to discuss the novels of Jane Austen, one at a time. As they debate Marianne's marriage to Brandon and whether or not Charlotte Lucas is gay, they reveal nothing so much as their own "private Austen(s)": to Jocelyn, an unmarried "control freak," the author is the consummate matchmaker; to solitary Prudie, she's the supreme ironist; to the lesbian Allegra, she's the disingenuous defender of the social caste system, etc. The book club's conversation is variously astute, petty, obvious and funny, but no one stays with it: the characters nibble high-calorie desserts, sip margaritas and drift off into personal reveries. Like Austen, Fowler is a subversive wit and a wise observer of human interaction of all stripes ("All parents wanted an impossible life for their children—happy beginning, happy middle, happy ending. No plot of any kind"). She's also an enthusiastic consumer of popular culture, offsetting the heady literary chat with references to *Sex and the City*, Linux and "a rug that many of us recognized from the Sundance catalog." Though the 21 pages of quotations from Austen's family, friends and critics seems excessive, the novelty of Fowler's package should attract significant numbers of book club members, not to mention the legions of Janeites craving good company and happy endings.

Kirkus Reviews * Starred Review *

The estimable Fowler (*Sister Noon*, etc.) offers a real delight as she follows the lives of six members of a book club.

Not a moment passes without its interest as we meet Jocelyn (who raises Rhodesian Ridgebacks); her best friend since girlhood, Sylvia (nee Sanchez); Sylvia's daughter Allegra, an artist who's now 30 and a lesbian; high-school French teacher, Prudie, 28 and flighty; the talkative Bernadette, turning 67 and the oldest; and the only man, Grigg Harris, unmarried, in his 40s, new to the neighborhood—and a science-fiction buff who's never read Jane Austen. Month by month, the group meets at one house or another to discuss the agreed-upon book, and all the while Fowler keeps things moving with a fine and inventive dexterity, lingering in the present at one moment, dipping way back into the adolescent years of Jocelyn and Sylvia at another (Sylvia marries Jocelyn's boyfriend; Jocelyn remains single), sometimes touching on the life of Austen herself, then popping back to escort us through Grigg's plain but fascinating history (he had three sisters, no brother), or to let us in on what makes Prudie flighty, how many husbands Bernadette had, or what happened when Allegra jumped from an airplane. Much of the charm lies in the book discussions themselves—never dry, ever revealing, always on the psychological mark—and much indeed also lies in the many perfect Austen-esque

moments, situations, misunderstandings, recognitions, and reversals that make up the web and woof of the novel. We learn early that after 30 years of perfect marriage Sylvia's husband has left her. That event, in one way or another, will touch on everyone, and before the end there'll be a positively lovely re-sorting of relationships, places, and positions, all done in today's most perfect emulation of Jane that you could ever imagine.

Bright, engaging, dexterous literary entertainment for everyone, though with many special treats and pleasures for Janeites.

The Washington Post's Book World

Five women and one man meet periodically to discuss the work of (arguably) the greatest novelist in English. Six people, one for each Jane Austen title. It is California, a hot summer in the Central Valley early in the 21st century, and these are ordinary people, neither happy nor unhappy, but each of them hurting in different ways, all of them mixed up about love.

Sylvia's husband, Daniel, has left her after 32 years and three children. Jocelyn, her best friend, never married and now focuses on breeding dogs. Prudie is a French teacher in her late twenties, in possession of a worthy husband yet disoriented by persistent fantasies about sex with other men. Sixty-something Bernadette has decided that she's finally over the hill and can act a little dotty, just let herself go. The beautiful, risk-taking Allegra -- Sylvia and Daniel's lesbian daughter -- has quit speaking to her lover. And Grigg, a middle-aged science fiction fan and computer whiz, is strangely unattached. But then maybe he's gay?

Together they form the "Central Valley/River City all-Jane-Austen-all-the-time book club." And with them Karen Joy Fowler creates a novel that is so winning, so touching, so delicately, slyly witty that admirers of *Persuasion* and *Emma* will simply sigh with happiness.

On the surface, the novel looks like elegant chick-lit. (But, in some lights, so does *Pride and Prejudice*.) At each meeting of the club we are told about room furnishings, the hors d'oeuvres and wine served, the issues raised by that week's book -- and about turning points in the past lives of the hostess (or host) of the evening. Not surprisingly, we hear mainly about first love, youthful identity crises and middle-aged angst. But somehow Fowler invests high school crushes, the gift and burden of older sisters, a restless dreamy father, a mother's devotion, previous marriages and all the common heartaches of life with unforced pathos. As a result, the reader inevitably bonds with the group as much as its members do with each other. Meanwhile, Fowler only gradually unfolds her true plot, even as she worries us (at least a little) with possible betrayal, injury, death.

But her understated humor is her real triumph. In fifth grade young Grigg is introduced to science fiction:

"His father handed him a magazine. On the cover was the picture of a woman in her underwear. Her black hair flew about her face in long, loose curls. Her eyes were wide. She had enormous breasts, barely contained by a golden bra.

"But best of all, unbelievably best, was the thing unhooking the bra. It had eight tentacled arms and a torso shaped like a Coke can. It was blue. The look on its face -- what an artist to convey so much emotion on a creature with so few features! -- was hungry." This is certainly an apt description of nearly any issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* or *Amazing* in their pulp heyday. But what a lovely balance between the typicality of the illustration, the absolute rightness of the boy's response and the author's unspoken affection for both.

Fowler is nowadays esteemed as a kind of magic realist in the Angela Carter mode - - see her novel *Sarah Canary* or the stories in *Black Glass* -- but longtime readers know that she comes out of science fiction. I wondered, for instance, if the bearded and bear-like but unnamed man that Jocelyn meets might be the late Damon Knight, not only a superb writer (author of the celebrated, much copied story "To Serve Man") but also a great teacher to generations of sf authors, from Gene Wolfe to Karen Joy Fowler herself.

In his approach to fiction Knight valued indirection, obliquity and polish over Space Ranger shoot-em-up action. Fowler's art is of this sort -- she approaches her characters' various stories at a slant, builds toward emotional climaxes, then swerves away at the last moment. Each chapter of *The Jane Austen Book Club* ends decorously, mutedly, implying that the reader's intelligence can fill in the gaps. You can readily see how much she's learned from Austen about structure -- and about irony. When someone describes *Northanger Abbey* as "very pomo," she writes:

"The rest of us weren't intimate enough with postmodernism to give it a nickname. We'd heard the word used in sentences, but its definition seemed to change with its context. We weren't troubled by this. Over at the university, people were paid to worry about such things; they'd soon have it well in hand." Every seemingly harmless sentence here is perfect, one easily overlooked put-down after another.

Probably the funniest exchanges in *The Jane Austen Book Club* take place at a dressy banquet. The group sits with a contemporary mystery novelist named Mo Bellington, who tells them about his "magpie motif. I use them for portents as well as theme. I could explain how I do that." The hapless Bellington -- one is tempted to call him Po-Mo -- has never read Austen, is even a little unclear about what she's written. Prudie attacks.

"Not five minutes earlier her mother's death had been painted across her face like one of those shattered women Picasso was so fond of. Now she looked dangerous. Now Picasso would be excusing himself, recollecting a previous engagement, backing away, leaving the building."

You certainly don't need to be an Austen addict to enjoy this charming novel, though cognoscenti will pick up, say, the parallels between Elizabeth Bennet's shifting attitudes toward Darcy and the criss-cross feelings that surprise two of these contemporary readers. Giving yet another twist to her own story, Fowler also includes a series of appendices: plot summaries of Austen's novels, several pages of brief critical comment on them by various notables and finally a series of "Questions for Discussion," these last supposedly formulated by the six characters we have just read about. Postmodern indeed.

In the end, though, *The Jane Austen Book Club* is no tricky fictive experiment. It's about real and ordinary life. Grigg's three big sisters hardly appear, but they are just wonderful -- shrewd, resolute and fiercely protective of their baby brother, no matter what his age. Fowler can summarize parental love in a deft, neatly ambivalent aperçu: "Sylvia thought how all parents wanted an impossible life for their children -- happy beginning, happy middle, happy ending. No plot of any kind. What uninteresting people would result if parents got their way." Even the dogs are keenly observed: "Sahara came away from the screen door. She leaned into Jocelyn, sighing. Then she circled three times, sank, and rested her chin on the gamy toe of Jocelyn's shoe. She was relaxed but alert. Nothing would get to Jocelyn that didn't go through Sahara first."

In the novel's final pages, as happy endings are starting to come together, Sylvia again reflects on children, and the thoughts are those of every middle-aged mother:

"Sylvia found herself suddenly, desperately missing the boys. Not the grown-up boys who had jobs and wives and children or, at least, girlfriends and cell phones, but the little boys who'd played soccer and sat on her lap while she read *The Hobbit* to them. She remembered how Diego had decided over dinner that he could ride a two-wheeler, and made them take the training wheels off his bike that very night, how he sailed off without a single wobble. She remembered how Andy used to wake up from dreams laughing, and could never tell them why."

It's just as hard to explain quite why *The Jane Austen Book Club* is so wonderful. But that it is wonderful will soon be widely recognized, indeed, a truth universally acknowledged.

The New York Times Book Review

On its surface, "*The Jane Austen Book Club*" is a tidy number, a perfectly cut and polished little gem with just enough facets. But that's not the half of it. This exquisite novel is bigger and more ambitious than it appears. It's that rare book that reminds us what reading is all about.

In her portrait of a California reading group, Karen Joy Fowler turns a mirror on the gawking, voyeuristic presence that lurks in every story: the reader. What results is Fowler's shrewdest, funniest fiction yet, a novel about how we engage with a novel. You don't have to be a student of Jane Austen to enjoy it, either. At the end are

plot synopses of all six Austen novels for the benefit of the forgetful, the uninitiated or the nostalgic.

The action takes place over several months in a university town near Sacramento (it sounds a lot like Davis, where Fowler lives), and the book club comprises five women and one man. It's clear from the beginning that in each of the six chapters, a different character will officiate, more or less, over a discussion of a different novel. Six chapters, six characters, six novels: an ingenious structure, and a reassuring one. But don't be lulled into the predictable assumption, that each chapter will be "Persuasion" or "Mansfield Park" in miniature, the respective characters and plots and life lessons presented in neat parallel universes. Nothing here is obvious, though we're lured into thinking otherwise early on. Fowler plants the bait at the very first meeting of the "all-Jane-Austen-all-the-time book club," as the members gather on a cool March evening to discuss "Emma." Their hostess, Jocelyn, is a "control freak" who has not only organized the club, picked the members and chosen the first book but is also a breeder of aristocratic show dogs and (lest we miss the point) a notorious matchmaker. Remind you of anyone?

The club meetings are peppered with the requisite literary patter ("Why isn't Knightley more appealing?" or "Her heroes tend to be actively nondescript"). But most of each chapter is about the members themselves, their stories told in detours and digressions. As we soon find, they're a varied bunch.

Jocelyn, in her early 50's, has never married. Sylvia, her best friend from childhood, has learned that her husband is leaving her for another woman. Sylvia's gorgeous 30-year-old daughter, Allegra, is an artist who has just broken up with her girlfriend. Prudie, a 28-year-old high school French teacher, is married but vaguely discontented. The eccentric Bernadette, single at 67, has had multiple husbands, including a movie mogul and a politician. Grigg, a temp in the linguistics department at the university, is in his early 40's (and surely in want of a wife).

Each of these members has "a private Austen" and sees the books through different eyes. Fowler is hilarious in revealing the proprietary attitudes some of them assume. Eyebrows are raised, for instance, when one character dares refer to the deity as Jane: "That was more intimate, surely, than Miss Austen would wish. None of the rest of us called her Jane, even though we were older and had been reading her years longer."

At first, the other women are stiff-necked about Grigg. Why did Jocelyn include him? He's not only a male and a newbie to Austen but he also has the bad taste to bring to the meetings an omnibus edition of the novels -- brand-new, no less, suggesting that "Austen was merely a recent whim." As if that weren't enough, Grigg is (gasp!) a science fiction fan. (This is a sly joke, if a bit insidery, since Fowler is a science fiction writer herself. In addition to her novels, "*Sister Noon*," "*The Sweetheart Season*" and the fantastical "*Sarah Canary*," she has published two collections of stories, many of them combining science fiction, fantasy and satire.)

In fact, as Grigg reveals during a discussion of "*Northanger Abbey*," he met Jocelyn at a science fiction convention the year before. "I was at the Hound Roundup," the dog-loving Jocelyn quickly reassures the others. "Same hotel." Fowler's flashback describing that weekend is one of the funniest diversions in the book. At one point, Jocelyn and a stranger fall into conversation at the hotel bar, not realizing they've just come from different seminars. He thinks she's a science fiction fan, she thinks he's a breeder of bassets, and they converse at cross-purposes in a scene worthy of Preston Sturges.

Jocelyn's *Emma*-like obsession with mating is another running joke: "In the kennel . . . you didn't have to ask them. You timed their encounter carefully, and leashed them together until the business was done." At a book club outing, she observes Grigg and his sister, who's visiting: "It was obviously a good bloodline. Both brother and sister had good teeth, neat little ears, deep chests, long limbs."

Each of the members brings something different to the club, something at once comic, affecting and lyrical. Sweet, good-natured Bernadette, in her caftans and flowered yoga pants, delights in Austen's nasty, sour characters, the ones who make life hell for everybody else. In a discussion of "*Sense and Sensibility*," she tells the group, "I don't think there's anything better in all of Austen than those pages where Fanny Dashwood persuades her husband, step by step by step, not to give his stepmother and sisters any money."

Prudie, who considers herself the club's "true Janeite," records her observations on index cards for later reference and likes to inject French phrases into the discussions, a habit the others find annoying: "If only she would stop speaking French. Or go to France, where it would be less noticeable."

Allegra wonders why that nice Charlotte Lucas, in "*Pride and Prejudice*," marries a blister like Mr. Collins. Why didn't Austen invent a good man for her? "What I was thinking was that Charlotte Lucas might be gay," Allegra tells Sylvia.

"Are you saying Austen meant her to be gay? Or that she's gay and Austen doesn't know it?" Sylvia asks. Then she muses: "There was something appealing in thinking of a character with a secret life that her author knew nothing about. Slipping off while the author's back was turned, to find love in her own way. Showing up just in time to deliver the next bit of dialogue with an innocent face."

This is a surprising novel, and there isn't a boring line in it. Most intriguing of all is the occasional narrator who steps in to describe the group's meetings in an unexpectedly cozy first-person plural: "We were quiet for a minute, listening to the fly buzz, thinking our private thoughts." But the speaker isn't any one of the six book club members. Then who is it? Some ghostly collective presence? Jane herself? Reader, is it . . . us?

FOWLER has played with this kind of notion before. The heroine of "Sister Noon" is a voracious reader of novels (including Austen's) who imagines "an unseen

narrator" hovering behind her, "marking her every move." In "*The Jane Austen Book Club*," the characters aren't just characters in a novel; they're readers too. Not only does each have a private Austen. Each is the leading character in her (or his) own novel.

Lovers of Austen will relish this book, but I envy any reader who comes to it unfamiliar with her. There's no better letter of introduction. The questions Fowler raises are endlessly fascinating. Is Austen all about love and courtship? Or money and class? Is she about second chances? Having it all or settling for less? And what of the characters who don't have happy endings? For that matter, what is a happy ending? "What if you had a happy ending and didn't notice?" Sylvia wonders.

Inevitably, reading groups will pounce on this novel. (There are even "questions for discussion" at the end, though some of them are more than a little tongue-in-cheek.) Talk about parallel universes -- just imagine a book club discussing a book about a book club discussing a book. That Jane! For a quiet spinster who rarely ventured farther than Bath, she does get around.

Literary Criticism

The fine art of appreciation

'Each of us has a private Austen' is the first line of Karen Joy Fowler's readable and ingenious novel. This sentence, and her title, encapsulate her theme. The West Coast book club in question consists of five women, all steeped in the Austen oeuvre, and a single man with long eyelashes called Grigg who has never read any Jane Austen at all. Their ages range from the mid-sixties to the late twenties. In their discussions, as we gradually realise, they project on to Jane Austen's plots and characters their own experiences and preoccupations; for between meetings we learn about their childhoods, love lives, and the scratchily close relationships which bind and divide them. One of the group is the narrator, but it is purposefully unclear which one.

The style of *The Jane Austen Book Club* is terse and sufficiently witty. While the author does not parody Jane Austen, she uses an Austen technique well described by Richard Jenkyns in *A Fine Brush on Ivory* as that of a playwright who provides few stage directions: the members of the book club reveal their idiosyncrasies in dialogue, and the reader smiles at their quiddities before the narrator steps in to crystallise what we have understood. But Fowler is less economical than Austen in the delivery of background information, and therefore less suggestive. Jane Austen's is 'a chastened art', as Jenkyns writes.

Jenkyns observes how the solidity of Jane Austen's characters makes it possible to judge them differently than she herself seems to. This is what makes her such a perfect subject for the book-club discussions. Trollope is the only other British author whose characters are discussed speculatively as if they were real people about whom one was having a gossip. Jenkyns's agreeable and lively book, though

it addresses form as well as content, has itself the conversational air of an extended and high-end book-club contribution; and if one were in his group, one would argue with him. He performs a convincing character assassination on Mr Woodhouse in *Emma* as a 'bloodsucker', an 'octopus'. But he exposes his own funny old-world social attitudes: Henry Crawford fell for quiet Fanny in *Mansfield Park* because he was 'exactly the type of man who marries his secretary'. Elsewhere, Jenkyns is just so modern. Mary in *Mansfield Park*, referring to admirals she has known, says 'Of Rears and Vices I saw enough.' The 'purport is unmistakeable', writes Jenkyns: Jane Austen made a joke about buggery! I don't think so. Jane Austen thought bottoms were funny (and vices too) in the context of admirals. There is another instance of this where Marianne, in *Sense and Sensibility*, speaking of the beauties of Devon, remarks, 'But those bottoms must be dirty in winter.' Jenkyns thinks this is 'plonkingly prosaic'. But come on, it's another bottom joke.

There are jokes in *The Jane Austen Book Club* too: tacit and ironic parallels between the Assembly Rooms at Bath and a fundraiser at the Sacramento Public Library; between the mating rituals in the Austen novels and dog-breeding and *Sex in the City*; between Grigg's addiction to science fiction and Catherine's to Gothic fiction in *Northanger Abbey*. Fowler's novel is in its way more didactic than *A Fine Brush on Ivory*. She includes a passage from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* which Jane Austen's Catherine is reading, since the members of the book club never have. The same may be true of some readers of *The Spectator*. She appends plot-summaries of all the novels, and quotable fragments of criticism and comment from the very first reviews to J. K. Rowling. Very useful for other book clubs.

Any 'Austen-bashing' in Fowler's fictional book club provokes unease. Book clubs are about 'appreciation'; and Jenkyns's book is subtitled 'An Appreciation'. The trouble with appreciation is that it is relentlessly appreciative. The critic takes out his teeth before settling in to browse. Any weakness is noticed tenderly, like Antony pointing out a small pimple on Cleopatra's nose. Much literary criticism, in contrast, since academics hijacked literature, has eschewed value judgments, history, biography, speculation, normal discourse and the desire to communicate with the reading public. Few critics find a satisfactory middle way for writing about writing.

But the port is still being passed round the table and seems to be stopping more frequently in front of the ghost of that great appreciator Lord David Cecil, born 1902. Richard Jenkyns is Professor of the Classical Tradition and also Public Orator at Oxford. Just keep on passing the port. What goes around comes around.

Source: Glendinning, Victoria. "The fine art of appreciation." *Spectator* 2 Oct. 2004: 43. Literature Resource Center. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions Source:

http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/jane_austen.html

1. The author opens the novel with a quote from Jane Austen, part of which reads, "Seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human

disclosure.” Do you agree with this sentiment? Why do you think the author chooses to open the novel with this quote? How might this statement apply to each of the characters in the book?

2. When the group is first being formed, Bernadette suggests that it should consist exclusively of women: “The dynamic changes with men. They pontificate rather than communicate. They talk more than their share.” (page 3). What do you think of her statement? How does Grigg affect the group’s dynamic? How would things have been different without him?
3. While the group is reading *Sense and Sensibility* and discussing Mrs. Dashwood, Sylvia mentions that “the problems of older women don’t interest most writers” (page 46) and is thrilled that Austen seems to care. Do you agree with this, that most writers aren’t interested in older women? What about society in general? How does Fowler approach older women? Later, Prudie says that “An older man can still fall in love. An older woman better not.” (page 47) Do you agree? How does Fowler deal with this issue?
4. On page 228 Sylvia asks, “Why should unhappiness be so much more powerful than happiness?” How would you answer her? How does each character find her/his own happiness in the novel?
5. The book club meets from March through August. How does the group change over these six months? “I always like to know how a story ends,” Bernadette says on page 199. How do you think this story ends (the “epilogue to the epilogue”)? Does Bernadette have a happy marriage with Senor Obando? Do Allegra and Corinne stay together? How about Jocelyn and Grigg? Daniel and Sylvia?
6. At the end of the novel, Jocelyn reluctantly agrees to read some science fiction, including the work of Ursula Le Guin, and really likes it. What other authors do you think the group might like? Although they would have to change the name of their group, what author would you suggest for the Central Valley/River City all-Jane-Austen-all-the-time book club to read next? What do you suggest for your own group?
7. If you’re new to Jane Austen, are you now interested in reading her work? Based on what you’ve learned from Karen Jay Fowler, which novel would you go to first? If you are already a “dedicated Janeite,” how has reading *The Jane Austen Book Club* made you feel about your favorite author? How would you describe your own “private Austen”? What novel would you recommend to first-time readers of Austen?

Multimedia

Review: 'The Jane Austen Book Club' (Radio Broadcast)

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1901037>

Book critic Maureen Corrigan reviews Karen Joy Fowler's *The Jane Austen Book Club* on NPR's *Fresh Air*.

The Jane Austen Book Club (Movie)

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1305953>

(Call number: DVD Comedy Jane)

A group of six friends, in Sacramento, gather to distract themselves from loss - a newly dumped Sylvia, Prudie's repressed disappointment, or Jocelyn, who has a life of unrealized dreams. All are devoted Jane Austen fans, except the lone man, Grigg, who has an ulterior motive for joining the chick-lit gang. There's plenty of pride (Prudie), prejudice (Jocelyn), sense (Sylvia), and sensibility (Sylvia's daughter Allegra). Throw in a fair amount of persuasion. Relationships and alliances unfold over the months.

Further Reading

A Jane Austen Education: How Six Novels Taught Me About Love, Friendship, and the Things That Really Matter by William Deresiewicz

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1381561>

(Call number: 823.7 De)

Austen scholar Deresiewicz turns to the author's novels to reveal the remarkable life lessons hidden within. With humor and candor, Deresiewicz employs his own experiences to demonstrate the enduring power of Austen's teachings.

Confessions of a Jane Austen Addict by Laurie Viera Rigler

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1298501>

(Call number: Fiction Rigler)

In this Jane Austen-inspired comedy, love story, and exploration of identity and destiny, a modern LA girl wakes up as an Englishwoman in Austen's time. After nursing a broken engagement with Jane Austen novels and Absolut, Courtney Stone wakes up and finds herself not in her Los Angeles bedroom or even in her own body, but inside the bedchamber of a woman in Regency England. Who but an Austen addict like herself could concoct such a fantasy? Not only is Courtney stuck in another woman's life, she is forced to pretend she actually is that woman; and despite knowing nothing about her, she manages to fool even the most astute observer.

Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World by Claire Harman

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1352891>

(Call number: 921 Austen)

In *Jane's Fame*, Claire Harman gives us the complete biography--of both the author and her lasting cultural influence--making this essential reading for anyone interested in Austen's life, works, and remarkably potent fame.

Read-Alikes

Dinner with Anna Karenina by Gloria Goldreich

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1259011>

(Call number: Fiction Goldreich)

When six dynamic women gather for their first book club meeting of the year, they are stunned to learn that the most envied and privileged member of the group is divorcing her perfect husband for reasons she cannot, and will not, share. Left to speculate about what happened--and what, in their own imperfect relationships, would constitute the ultimate betrayal, they reveal the burdens, bitterness and painful truths they have long been hiding, and in doing so, try to find the courage to open a new chapter in their own lives.

Angry Housewives Eating Bon Bons by Lorna Landvik

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1199434>

(Call number: Fiction Landvik)

From her sensational sleeper hit "*Patty Jane's House of Curl*" to her heartwarming novel "*Welcome to the Great Mysterious*," Landvik has won the hearts of readers everywhere. Now she returns to her beloved, eccentric stomping ground of small-town Minnesota where a most eclectic, and engaging group of women share love, loss, and laughter.

The Reading Group by Elizabeth Noble

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1235070>

(Call number: Fiction Noble)

What starts out as a lark of an idea, born from a glass of wine and a need to socialize, turns into a forum for five very different women who walk complicated paths--but soon discover the power and importance of friendship.

Summer Reading by Hilma Wolitzer

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1283707>

(Call number: Fiction Wolitzer)

Summer Reading offers a seductive glimpse into the intersecting lives of three very different women. Summer in the Hamptons means crowded beaches during the day and lavish parties in the evening, but Angela Graves, a retired English professor, prefers the company of Gabriel García Márquez and Charlotte Brontë. Her only steady social contacts are with the women in the reading groups she leads, among them, is wealthy Lissy Snyder, a beautiful newlywed who hosts the twice-monthly meetings of the Page Turners and takes pains to hide a reading disability and her emotional neediness. Hamptons local Michelle Cutty, Lissy's housecleaner, eavesdrops on the group's discussions--of books and gossip--when she's not snooping through Lissy's closets. All three women secretly struggle with troubling personal issues that threaten the tenuous balance of their lives: Lissy, abandoned by her father in childhood, is now the unwilling stepmother of her husband's hostile children; Michelle, resentful of the moneyed arrogance of the jet-setting, seasonal "invaders," can't secure a commitment from her fisherman boyfriend; and solitary, bookish Angela still bears the shameful memory of a disastrous love affair that took place long ago.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extra!

Discuss which character members of the book group relate to the most and why. Also, who did people empathize with the least?

