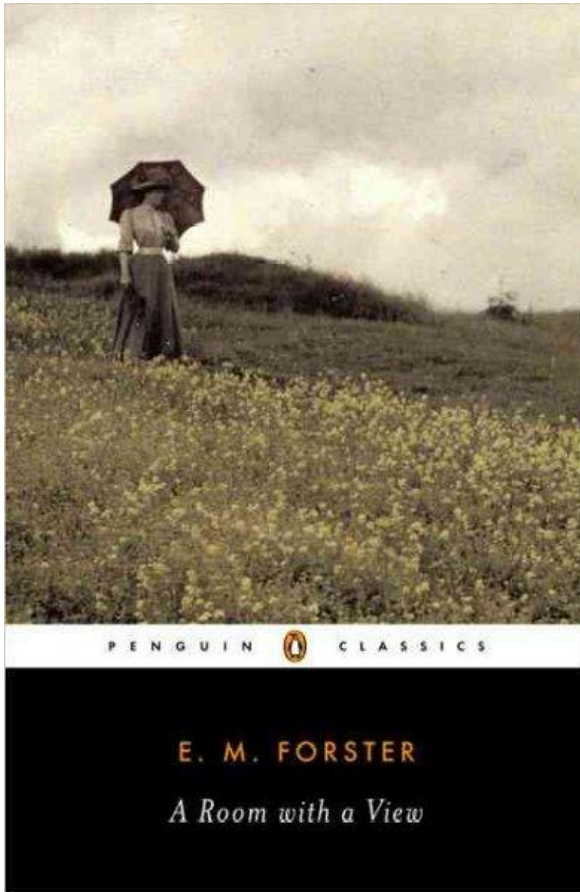


Ann Arbor District Library: Book Club to Go Discussion Guide

About the Book



It opens in an English pensione in Florence with a confrontation between Lucy Honeychurch's chaperone Miss Bartlett and the upstart Mr. Emerson and his son George; the two men generously, but in Miss Bartlett's view indecorously, offer to exchange rooms, in order to give the ladies the benefit of a room with a view, a favour which they reluctantly accept. The novel describes the inmates of the Pensione Bertolini, among them the clergyman Mr. Beebe and the 'original' lady novelist Miss Lavish, and their reactions to Italy and to one another. Lucy, an impressionable and artistic but immature girl, is disturbed first by witnessing a street murder, and then by an impulsive embrace from George Emerson during an excursion to Fiesole. Miss Bartlett removes her charge from these dangers, and the two return to Summer Street, in Surrey, where Lucy becomes engaged to a cultured dilettante, Cecil Vyse, whom Mr. Beebe, who has reappeared as the local vicar, ominously describes as 'an ideal bachelor'. The Bertolini cast continues to reassemble as the Emersons take a villa in the neighbourhood. Lucy comes to realize that she loves George, not Cecil, but it takes her some time to extricate herself (helped, unexpectedly, by Miss Bartlett) from what she describes as 'the muddle'. The second half of the drama is played against a sharply and intimately observed background of tennis and tea parties and amateur piano recitals; it ends in the Pensione Bertolini, with George and Lucy on their honeymoon. Source: <http://emforster.de>

About the Author



Edward Morgan Forster was born on 1 January 1879 in London, England to Alice Clara *née* Whichelo (1855-1945) and architect Edward Morgan Llewellyn Forster (1847-1880) who died soon after his son was born. Living at Rooksnest (which would later prove the model for *Howards End* near Stevenage in Hertfordshire) young Edward was raised by his mother, aunts, and governesses. A precocious young man, he started writing stories at the age of six. He attended the Tonbridge School in Kent County, then went on to study history,

He received his Bachelor of Arts in 1900. Although his public school years were unhappy, at King's he blossomed under tutors and the atmosphere of intellectual freedom. He joined groups like the Cambridge Conversazione Society, also known as the Cambridge Apostles, and met lifelong friends including Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862-1932). Many of them went on to form the Bloomsbury Group.

After coming into an inheritance from his Great Aunt Marianne Thornton (1797-1887), Forster was off on his first of many trips to Europe with his mother. They visited Italy, then Greece, where Forster first experienced the Mediterranean culture he would grow to love and write about. When he was not travelling he lived with his mother at Abinger Hammer in Surrey until her death in 1944. Forster knew early on he would be a writer and was fortunate enough to not experience financial hardships. His first of many sketches, essays, and stories was printed in the *Independent Review* in 1904. Later, he contributed greatly to the London literary journal *The Athenaeum*. His first novel *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), set in Tuscany, was followed by his Bildungsroman novel *The Longest Journey* (1907), Rickie Elliot being one of his most autobiographical characters. *A Room With a View* (1908) was Forster's next work, a romance set in Italy, contrasted with Edwardian England's society and mores. While he started writing *Maurice* in 1912, it was not officially published until after his death in 1971.

During World War I, while Forster was in Alexandria, Egypt serving with the Red Cross, he met and fell in love with Mohammed el Adl (1900-1922), a young tram conductor. He also penned short stories that were printed in local newspapers under his pseudonym 'Pharos'. Works inspired by this period of his life include

Alexandria: A History and Guide (1922) and *Pharos and Pharillon: A Novelist's Sketchbook of Alexandria Through the Ages* (1923), printed by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. Forster also spent much time in India and became well-acquainted with the conflict between the British Raj and the Indian Independence Movement of which he wrote about in *A Passage to India* (1924), his last novel to reach international acclaim. In recognition he won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Prix Femina Vie Heureuse.

Forster was deeply committed to numerous literary causes during his lifetime including PEN, the international association of writers. He was a witness for the defence in the obscenity case of D.H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. As an Honorary Fellow at Cambridge, he lectured there and was a well-known and respected figure on campus. After the death of his mother he maintained residences at Cambridge and in London. In the 1950's he worked with Eric Crozier to write the libretto to Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*, based on Herman Melville's 1924 novel of the same name. In 1953 he was awarded the Order of Companions of Honor and in 1969 given Queen Elizabeth's Order of Merit. At the age of ninety, on 7 June 1970, Edward Morgan Forster died at the home in Coventry of friend and long-time companion Robert Buckingham.

Source: *The Literature Network*: <http://www.online-literature.com/forster>

Book Reviews

Penguin Classics

In a journal entry from July, 1910, E. M. Forster wrote, "However gross my desires, I find that I shall never satisfy them for the fear of annoying others. I am glad to come across this much good in me. It serves instead of purity." Although Forster wrote this passage some two years after he published *A Room with a View*, it could have been written at almost anytime during his long life. However much he understood the "holiness of direct desire," the emotional purity one achieves by following the heart rather than social orthodoxy, he spent his youth and young adulthood, as Lucy Honeychurch nearly did, repressing his sexual desires to adhere to the expectations of society.

Forster was only twenty-nine years old when he published *A Room with a View* in 1908. He had already published two books, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905) and *The Longest Journey* (1907). He was a respected writer, but not yet a famous one, and the themes touched on in his earlier novels—passion and

convention, truth and pretense—were now given complexity and eloquence, with the maturity of a more experienced voice, in his third novel.

The first seeds for an Italian novel were planted during an extended trip to Florence that Forster and his mother took in 1901. This journey not only unleashed Forster's creativity, but also provided a source of spiritual release from the rigid moral codes of English society. His depression over his own self-deception and his increasing mistrust of English middle-class society are mirrored in the conflicted relationship between the cautious, thoroughly English Honeychurches and the impulsive, free-spirited, socialist Emersons. Forster was tormented, like Lucy, with the possibility of becoming one of "the vast armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain, and march to their destiny by catch-words."

While Lucy embodied Forster's internal strife, Mr. Emerson was created in the image of a man Forster admired, Edward Carpenter, a social pioneer who believed in equality for women and open expression of homosexual love. First through his published works, and later as a friend, Carpenter was to Forster a beacon of spiritual and sexual liberation who guided him toward a deeper understanding of himself. For Lucy, Mr. Emerson is the "kind old man who enabled her to see the lights dancing in the Arno," who encourages her to follow her heart's and her body's desire, explaining that "love is of the body; not the body, but of the body." This advice she must heed, as Forster makes sure, in breaking from the fettered world of Windy Corner and choosing truth over deceit.

The happy resolution of *A Room with a View* did not come easily to Forster. He started work in earnest on the first draft of his novel in 1902, setting the story entirely in Italy. Forster began the final version in 1904, but put it aside to complete *Where Angels Fear to Tread* and *The Longest Journey*. Forster would not pick up *A Room with a View* again until 1907, when he commented to a friend, "It's bright and merry and I like the story. Yet I wouldn't and couldn't finish it in the same style." Completing the work would require another full year.

The "bright and merry" surface of the novel owes much to the social comedies of Jane Austen and Henry James. Like the heroines of *Mansfield Park* and *Daisy Miller*, Lucy begins the novel as a naif on the threshold of adulthood in a strange new world. Forster captures the pretense and manners of her social world with uncanny acuity. As Virginia Woolf wrote, "The social historian will find his books full of illuminating information. . . . Old maids blow into their gloves

when they take them off. Mr. Forster is a novelist . . . who sees his people in close contact with their surroundings." Like his forebears, he described the world around him with remarkable precision and insight.

Forster readily acknowledged his debt to the 19th-century domestic comedy, but said that he "tried to hitch it on to other things"—to the deeper themes of his work, such as the struggle for individuality and the barriers of social class. Forster's plots and landscapes carry greater metaphorical weight than those of his predecessors: Lucy's anguish in choosing between George and Cecil becomes a contest of modernity against the middle ages, honesty against hypocrisy, clarity against muddle. This subtext provides a richly textured counterpoint to superficial events. The novel's ending is not unambiguously joyful. It almost seems that Forster allowed George and Lucy happiness against his own instincts. "Oh Mercy to myself I cried if Lucy didn't wed," Forster wrote in a letter as he was writing the final version of the novel.

Ultimately Lucy was more successful in fulfilling her desires than Forster ever was. As he composed *A Room with a View* in 1907, Forster was still more than six years away from writing his great celebration of homosexual love, *Maurice*, and his first fully realized romance lay even further in the future. How did this repressed desire color the development of the novel? The critical literature has shown great interest in the erotic undertones of the men's bath at Sacred Lake and possible veiled references to Mr. Beebe's homosexuality ("somewhat chilly in his attitude toward the other sex"). Some even believe that the entire work is a homosexual romance with Lucy as "a boy en travesti." In the end the object of desire is probably less important than the passionate sentiment. What is remarkable, as critic Claude Summers notes, is that Forster's wrestling with homosexual desire should give rise to one of the richest depictions of heterosexual love in the English language.

Certainly *A Room with a View* can be appreciated from this perspective as a story of sexual awakening that provides insight into Forster's deeply felt struggle with his own sexuality. But it can be read on other levels as well. As a domestic comedy in the tradition of Jane Austen, it brilliantly skewers the world of Edwardian manners and social codes, providing some of Forster's most riotous and revealing portraits in the characters of Cecil Vyse and Charlotte Bartlett. It also can be enjoyed as a book about the contradictions and conflicts of being human: how we reconcile our inner lives with outside expectations, and how it is possible, by opening one's mind, to find faith and love in unexpected places.

Source: http://www.litlovers.com/guide_roomwithv.html

Literary Criticism

Though they had profited handsomely by industrialization, Britain's upper classes did not view technology with the enthusiasm characteristic of Americans. They still held to the feudal or "medieval" view, which held that profit should accumulate in their pockets--they saw themselves as the center of the universe. Technology, for the elite, achieved a good investment return, which they enjoyed, but it also increased the prosperity of the lower classes. Gains in productivity allowed for healthier wage packets while union action shortened the workweek. Thus, members of the working class began to play sports on their off days, women went shopping in arcades built with new building technology, families rode bikes and went on outings to museums and parks. The elite did not meet this alteration bravely and continued to insist on class separation. This tension is at the heart of E. M. Forster's novel *A Room with a View*, whose message of ultimate compromise includes dismantling the nature versus civilization dichotomy. Cecil Vyse, who offers a speech to Lucy Honeychurch to the effect that the classes ought to intermingle, notes that the rabble are even eating better so that "the physique of the lower-middle classes was improving at a most appalling rate."

Industrial progress can be a boon so long as its goal is to make human lives better; industrial progress cannot be, for Forster, an end in itself. In other words, humans cannot be bound to machines. The choice depends upon our view of things, a problem as old as Plato's room."

Before industrialization accelerated in the eighteenth century, Europeans regarded themselves as warring against nature for their very lives. That changed when the Renaissance revived science and took advantage of medieval mechanics. Attitudes altered as civilization gained the upper hand and began to control nature. By the nineteenth century, control was all but attained and philosophic figures like Thomas Carlyle began to suggest a new attitude of harmony. They declared that the battle was over; civilization and its technics were harmonious parts of nature, not at war with it. Theories of evolution helped bolster the idea that by cooperating with nature, humans would prosper in both wealth and health. One technology stands out in this period and in Forster's novel because it was the growth engine of the nineteenth century economy, the steam engine atop a wheel carriage.

The rich invested heavily in the railroad in the late nineteenth century and they received handsome rewards. However, the railroad allowed unprecedented social mobility and created an entirely new class of rich people. Walt Whitman captured the appreciation of this technology in his 1851 poem, "To a Locomotive in Winter." There, the locomotive was a beautiful creature set free in nature. The railroad quickly became more than just a creature; it became a liberator of people and latent potential. The railroads enabled greater prosperity for all people which led, of course, to increased mingling of the classes. The railroad, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it in "The Young American," "is the magician's rod, in its power to evoke sleeping energies of land and water." Emerson celebrated technology because it enables people to further their abilities to open up land to agriculture and the progress of civilization. Only by the employment of technology can people build a Garden of Eden where everyone is fed and clothed--a garden, after all, employs cutting-edge agricultural technology. That is the message of Forster's book, a realization that the American spirit is a good one and Britain would do well to learn from it. Britain, as the novel shows, may not be able to Americanize because of people like the Vyses and, therefore, places like Italy might be the better place for that spirit.

The discussion of technological advance occurs at several points in the novel. While in Florence, Mr. Eager notes the way in which trams enable people of the lower classes to take outings in the countryside. However, the reality of a working person's life justifies Mr. Eager's pity for them. Still, trams enable the "poor" to walk where only the rich had previously. Sir Harry Otway enunciates the anxieties of the rich to Mr. Vyse. He fears, he says, that he will rent to the wrong sort of person because the physical barriers that had kept the rich apart have been overrun. The rich had always been able to afford the time and expense of country estates, but both time and expense were being leveled by the railroad. "The train service has improved--a fatal improvement, to my mind. And what are five miles from a station in these days of bicycles?" He worries that the bike and the train will enable the working-class man to afford a home away from the toxicity of industry (cars will soon make the matter worse). His fears are realized when the Emersons, the working-class heroes of the novel, move in. Though only Mrs. Honeychurch makes the connection, Mr. Emerson, who was a mechanic before going into journalism for socialist organs, follows the teachings of the American philosopher already mentioned. George, appropriately, works as a clerk for a railroad company. Otway had hoped for a bank clerk, an occupation he understood, but in the new economy, suggests Forster, the railroad clerk becomes the victor.

The novel assesses the anxiety of the wealthy classes in terms of its inability to change its view of life by which is meant, philosophies of life or interpretations of the universe--how things work. The rich, like Otway and Vyse, are conservative; they want class separations maintained with themselves at the top according to the medieval ideals. They see nature as something to be controlled for their benefit as it was in feudal times. They can be thought of "as in a room" or protected by "fences" and ensconced in palaces and churches. Members of this view "have no profession." Instead, they manage and accumulate wealth--the Vyses are parasites whose salary is made up of dividends. The Emersons are liberals, meaning they believe in individual rights and democratic institutions. They are humanists and base their judgments about society on empirical data "of," not from (as in stolen), nature. Thus, they can be thought of as a view without obstructing walls. People who share the Emersons' view live by their own labor and they enjoy bodily pleasure. Reason governs their behavior.

In Freudian terms, a person of cathexis focuses his mind toward one goal or view of life. Such a person can be described as anal or unyielding. This person frequently becomes the center of a comedy whose end is his catharsis. That is, events and experiences of disruption force the person of cathexion to see things differently and realize he had been narrow-minded. A catharsis is, literally, a release of psychic energy, a release from being anal, which allows for a readjusted and more balanced psyche. Forster's comedy is different. The Vyses cannot help but live up to their name, which conjures the Latin verb "to see." Vyse also conjures the mechanical apparatus, the vise. As the leading members of society, such allusions are fitting. The Vyses stick to their rules and view of society normally described as hive-like. The blending of the biologic and mechanical is no accident. The society which the Vyses lead is, in modern parlance, like the Borg from Gene Rodenberry's *Star Trek* series. They attach people to their system after period of molding. In terms of the history of technics, the society of Vyse is a megamachine whose purpose is to maintain its members and itself by acquisition of new members and adamant adherence to decorum. The cathected are not saved by the story; hope lies in the young who have not yet made up their view.

Forster hated the megamachine of the Vyses'. In a short story written after *A Room with a View* he was even more vitriolic in his characterization of this tendency in humans to live in cathexion. In "The Machine Stops," a machine does all of society's work so that the humans can sit in their rooms away from each other and continually fabricate aesthetic systems. The body is left to

atrophy. However, Forster does not foresee total divorce from the body and, therefore, maintains the hope of reconnecting with the body or giving the room a view. The Emersons are that hope. They are part of the middle class whose physique has improved with industrialization. They believe in communal recreation of the Garden where technology does not take over society but positively aids people in their lives. The Emersons, in their ideal, can be thought of as a utopic view of boundless progress. Forster, a pragmatist, believes in a compromise made possible by Lucy who, as light, can bring the two worlds together. She brings music, art, and literature to match George's modern philosophy and technology.

The marriage of the two views happens in Florence--one of the cities responsible for the change in Europe described as the Renaissance. That epoch of rediscovery held out the possibility of compromise from the outset. A historical example of this can be found in the efforts of a man who lived in Florence during the Renaissance and arguably has had the greatest view of the cosmos. His very name has become a synonym for clear sight. His sight would not be obfuscated by religious doctrine or doubt but fueled by Baconian practice. Galileo Galilei, court mathematician to the Medici, had the clearest view of all the Renaissance thinkers and it was straight up. His observations led to the downfall of the old geocentric view of the universe and the rise of a heliocentric view of the universe. Forster's location of his novel about views and technological attitudes was appropriately placed in Florence. Forster's sense of compromise matches Galileo's, who did not want to overthrow or disagree with the Catholic Church (the story often told about his "trial"). Instead, Galileo believed he utilized his God-given talents to explore God's wondrous creations in order to glorify the Catholic faith. Galileo failed to observe a separation between religion and science.

"It was the old, old battle of the room with a view." The statement stands like a thesis within a theory about human nature. While it appears to announce that there is nothing new in the Lucy problem, it also luxuriates in the timelessness within the problem. Industrial progress can be a boon so long as its goal is to make human lives better; industrial progress cannot be, for Forster, an end in itself. In other words, humans cannot be bound to machines. The choice depends upon our view of things, a problem as old as Plato's room. The old, old battle is over whether or not humans will stay looking at the shadows on the wall or go out of the cave. The Emersons remind the reader that "there is only one perfect view--the view of the sky straight over our heads, and . . . all these other views on earth are but bungled copies of it." Forster celebrated life and sunlight

but he was not against technology. Forster, writing at a time when Europe had created a science of fatigue and was obsessed with industrial efficiency, points out that the important things are to observe nature as our forebears did. And maybe observe and pay attention to each other. Machines, as critics of Taylorism were quick to see, can numb the senses of the human worker. Forster wants that worker to be able to have fun in the sun once in a while far from "the world of motor cars."

Source: Hubbell, Jeremy W. "Critical Essay on 'A Room with a View.'" *Literature Resource Center*. <http://www.aadl.org/research/browse/books>

Discussion Questions Source: http://www.litlovers.com/guide_roomwithv.html

1. How are Lucy's character and mood captured in the descriptions of her piano playing throughout the novel? Why does she refuse to play Beethoven in Mrs. Vyse's well-appointed flat? What compels her to sing, after breaking her engagement with Cecil, the song that ends with the line "Easy live and quiet die"?
2. Forster's use of light and darkness, vision and blindness, day and night has transparent meaning in many passages: Lucy throws open the window of her room with a view while Charlotte closes the shades. Cecil is best suited to a room, while George is in his element in the naked sunlight of the Sacred Lake. Discuss the variations on the theme of clarity and shadow in the book, for example the twilight on the Piazza Signoria before Lucy witnesses the murder, or her attempts to flee "the king of terrors—Light" in the novel's second half.
3. Lucy and George both stand outside Britain's traditional class structure. George is a clerk, the son of a journalist and grandson of a laborer. Lucy is the daughter of a lawyer and her social status is "more splendid than her antecedents entitled her to." What role does social class play in the novel? Why did Forster choose Cecil to deliver the statement: "The classes ought to mix...There ought to be intermarriage—all sorts of things. I believe in democracy."?
4. Mr. Beebe is portrayed early in the novel as an observant, thoughtful counselor with a good sense of humor and an unusually open mind for a clergyman. Soon after meeting Lucy he predicts that "one day music and life shall mingle" for her. Why does he fail, in the end, to support her

decision to leave Cecil for George?

5. In comparison, Charlotte Bartlett is absurdly prudish, forbidding her cousin even to sleep in the bed where George Emerson had slept. If George's surmise at the novel's end is correct, what motivates her to help bring the lovers together by facilitating Lucy's fateful meeting with Mr. Emerson? What does this turnabout suggest about the repressive forces in society? Is she, as George jokes, made of the "same stuff as parsons are made of"?
6. "Muddle" is one of Forster's favorite words and seems to carry more weight in his work than in current colloquial usage. Lucy declares at the end of Part 1, "I want not to be muddled. I want to grow older quickly." What does Mr. Emerson mean when he uses the word to describe Lucy's state of mind near the novel's end, saying, "It is easy to face Death and Fate...It is on my muddles that I look back with horror"?
7. Lucy and George's final happiness is clouded by their severed relations with those she left behind. The Honeychurches "were disgusted at her past hypocrisy," and Mr. Beebe will never forgive them. Do you think Forster believes, as Lucy asserts, that "if we act the truth, the people who really love us are sure to come back to us in the long run"?
8. What is "medieval" about Cecil's attitude toward women in general and toward Lucy in particular? What role is she allotted in his notion of chivalry? Why does Lucy feel, after George throws her blood-stained photographs into the Arno, that it is "hopeless to look for chivalry in such a man"? What kind of companionship and protection does George offer in exchange?
9. Forster, who was greatly influenced by the art of Italy during his first visit there, not only explores the proper relationship of life and art in *A Room with a View* but also uses art to illuminate his characters. What do we learn about the inner lives of George and Mr. Emerson from their views of Giotto's fresco in Santa Croce (Chapter 2)? Why is Lucy's outburst over Mr. Eager like "Leonardo on the ceiling of the Sistine"?
10. A frequent criticism of Forster's plots is his reliance on coincidence and chance. What improbable circumstances are required to unite Lucy and George? Is George right when he says of their reunion in England, "It

is Fate. Everything is Fate"? Does the novel suggest an external force that brings the lovers together?

11. There are many kinds of deceit in the book: betrayal by friends, secrets between lovers, and most importantly Lucy's self-deceit. Four of the last five chapters show Lucy lying to nearly everyone else in the book. Which kinds of lies are most harmful to the "personal relations" that Forster cherished?
12. Though sparing in his descriptions of physical love, Forster often expresses the physical component of spiritual passion indirectly, as in his description of Lucy's piano playing: "Like every true performer she was intoxicated by the mere feel of the notes: they were fingers caressing her own; and by touch, not by sound alone, did she come to her desire." What balance between the physical and emotional expressions of love does Mr. Emerson suggest in his statement, "I know by experience that the poets are right: love is eternal. . . . I only wish poets would say this too: love is of the body; not the body, but of the body"?

Multimedia

Tribute to E. M. Forster from 1970 (Video Clip)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umxE5Efldal>

A Room With A View (Movie)
<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1312529>

Further Reading

A Passage to India by E. M. Forster
<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1025247>

Adela Quested arrives in colonial India to marry Ronny Heaslop, a narrow-minded bureaucrat who despises Indians. She teams up with Ron's mother, Mrs. Moor, and Dr. Aziz, a charming native, to see the "real" India, but an incident exposes sharp tensions in the imperialist system. Forster is highly sensitive to the differences among Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Despite the serious topic and the author's pessimism about bridging cultures, *A Passage to India* is a comic, even witty, novel.

Howards End by E. M. Forster

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1025189>

The disregard of a dying woman's bequest, a girl's attempt to help an impoverished clerk, and the marriage of an idealist and a materialist -- all intersect at an estate called Howards End. The fate of this country home symbolizes the future of England in an exploration of social, economic, and philosophical trends during the post-Victorian era.

Where Angels Fear to Tread by E. M. Forster

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1025285>

A wonderful story of questioning, disillusionment, and conversion, "*Where Angels Fear to Tread*" tells the story of a prim English family's encounter with the foreign land of Italy. When attractive, impulsive English widow Lilia marries Gino, a dashing and highly unsuitable Italian twelve years her junior, her snobbish former in-laws make no attempts to hide their disapproval. But their expedition to face the uncouth foreigner takes an unexpected turn when they return to Italy under tragic circumstances intending to rescue Lilia and Gino's baby.

The Longest Journey by E. M. Forster

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1025209>

E. M. Forster once described "*The Longest Journey*" as "the book I am most glad to have written." An introspective novel of manners at once comic and tragic, it tells of a sensitive and intelligent young man with an intense imagination and a certain amount of literary talent. He sets out full of hope to become a writer, but gives up his aspirations for those of the conventional world, gradually sinking into a life of petty conformity and bitter disappointments.

Tea With Mussolini

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1227312>

Based in part on his autobiography, director Franco Zeffirelli's *Tea with Mussolini* is a story about a group of British and American travelers on an indefinite visit to Italy in 1935. Luca is a boy living in Florence whose family situation is precarious at best; his mother has run off and his father has little time for him. Fortunately, he's a welcome guest with Mary, a English woman visiting Italy to soak up European culture. Mary and her friends enjoy the cultured, creative atmosphere of life in Italy, and their initial response to the rise of fascism is to arrange a polite meeting with Mussolini to make sure he and his soldiers mean well.

Enchanted April

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1334377>

London, the 1920s. Lottie and Rose are two married women who share the misery of empty marriages and decide to rent an Italian castle for the spring to get away. In order to save money, they advertise for two other women to join them. Mrs. Fisher is an elderly widow struggling with a lonely and regimented existence. She jumps at the chance to join the vacation. Lady Caroline Dester is a gorgeous flapper who has been grabbed one too many times and believes that she is sick of men. They arrive in San Salvatore. The seaside Italian castle is drenched in wisteria and sunshine. The women find themselves in a transformative beauty so enchanting that they experience changes in themselves they never thought possible.

Read-Alikes

Book Club To Go! *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1007480>

Jane Austen's most popular and well-known work, *Pride and Prejudice* follows Elizabeth Bennet and her sisters as they navigate the social milieu of provincial 18th-century England.

The Go-Between by L.P. Hartley

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1371743>

Summering with a fellow schoolboy on a great English estate, Leo, the hero of L. P. Hartley's finest novel, encounters a world of unimagined luxury. But when his friend's beautiful older sister enlists him as the unwitting messenger in her illicit love affair, the aftershocks will be felt for years.

The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1036071>

Transplanted to Europe from her native America, Isabel Archer has candor, beauty, intelligence, an independent spirit and a marked enthusiasm for life. An unexpected inheritance apparently gives her freedom, but despite all her natural advantages she makes one disastrous error of judgment and the result is genuinely tragic.

Summer by Edith Wharton

<http://www.aadl.org/catalog/record/1319528>

One of the first novels to deal honestly with a woman's sexual awakening, *Summer* created a sensation upon its 1917 publication. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Ethan Frome* shattered the standards of conventional love stories with candor and realism. Nearly a century later, this tale remains fresh and relevant.

Summaries from AADL.org Catalog

Extras!

Do you think travel changes people? Discuss travel experiences from your past with the group.

