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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

Bootlegger's Daughter
by
Margaret Maron
(New York: Warner Books, 1993)

Author:

Margaret Maron grew up on a farm near Raleigh, North Carolina, but for many years lived in Brooklyn, New York. When she returned to her North Carolina roots with her artist-husband, Joe, she began thinking about a series based on her own background and went on to write *Bootlegger's Daughter*, a *Washington Post* bestseller and winner of the 1993 Edgar, Agatha, Macavity, and Anthony Awards. Other Deborah Knott novel, *Southern Discomfort*, was nominated for the Agatha Award for Best Novel; *Shooting at Loons*, which followed, was nominated for an Agatha and an Anthony Award; *Up Jumps the Devil*, was nominated for an Agatha Award. [From the book jacket]

Summary:

Unconventional North Carolina attorney Deborah Knott does the unthinkable when she tosses her hat into the heated race for district judge of old-boy ruled Colleton County. Then suddenly, the young daughter of Janie Whitehead begs her to investigate Janie's unsolved, eighteen-year-old murder. Taking the case, Deborah uncovers dangerous old secrets...and someone determine to derail her future-political and otherwise. But it will take more than sleazy scare tactics to frighten this tough steel magnolia off the scent of down-home deceit...even in a town where a cool slug of moonshine made by Deborah's father can go down as smoothly as a cold case of triple murder. [From the book jacket]

Questions:

1. How is the book structured? Does the author use any narrative devices like flashbacks or multiple voices in telling the story? How did this affect your reading of the story and your appreciation of the book? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
2. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read his or her favorite passage out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) How does this particular passage relate to the story as a whole? Does it reveal anything specific about any of the characters or illuminate certain aspects of the story?
3. Discuss the mystery aspect of the plotline. How effective is the author's use of plot twists and red herrings? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened, or did the author keep you guessing until the end of the story? Did you find that the novel held everyone's interest throughout the story, or were there times when it failed to totally engross members of the group?

4. How important is the setting to the story? If applicable, discuss the time period in which the book is set. Does the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story?
5. What is the most important part of a mystery or thriller to each member of the group—characterization, action, dialogue, or setting? How does this book rate in each of these areas?
6. Is this book part of a series? If so, did your group read the series in order? How has reading the books in order—or not reading them in order—affected your group's enjoyment of the book? How does this book stack up against others in the series?
7. Is the author equally invested in both character and plot? Or did the author put more effort into developing the story than in creating compelling and believable characters? Were the motivations of the characters believable, or did their actions feel like a means to further the plot?
8. Agatha Christie wrote in her autobiography about her dislike of mysteries having a romantic subplot. Do you agree or disagree with her views? Did this book have an element of romance? If so, do you feel the love aspect enhanced or detracted from the story?
9. Would you recommend this work to a non mystery/thriller fan simply on the basis of its literary merit? Would you endorse it purely because of the skillful writing and the well-developed characters? Or do you think the work would strictly appeal to fans of the mystery/thriller genre.
10. Is your group familiar with the author's previous works? If so, did this book live up to or exceed your expectations of the author?
11. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more work by this author?

[Questions from Reading Group Guides

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/content/index.asp>]

Further Reading:

The Deborah Knott Mysteries: *Southern Discomfort*; *Shooting at Loons*; *Up Jumps the Devil*; *Killer Market*; *Home Fires*; *Storm Track*; *Uncommon Clay*; *Slow Dollar*; *High Country Fall*; *Rituals of the Season*; *Winter's Child*; *Hard Row*; *Death's Half Acre*.

A Rumor of Bones: A Lindsay Chamberlain Novel. Beverly Connor. Nashville, Tenn.: Cumberland House, 1996.

Blanche on the Lam. Barbara Neely. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992

Every Crooked Nanny. Kathy Hogan Trocheck. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992.

Listen to the Silence. Marcia Muller. New York: Mysterious Press, 2000.

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