

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS  
for  
ONE PECULIAR SUMMER

1. "All is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

This quote by Edmund Burke obviously applies to the problems in the church. How else does it foreshadow the events unfolding in the life of Franny Primm during that peculiar summer of 1957?

2. The book opens with setting. Does this adequately seduce the reader into the novel? How important is setting to the story?

3. Franny is eleven, intellectually precocious yet very naïve - especially when it comes to sex. She doesn't really understand her feelings for Bobby Frye or the relationships between her mother and her uncle or Daddy Ben and Sugar Tate. The story is narrated from Franny's adult perspective. Did you find this juxtaposition of viewpoints believable? Could Franny's character exist in our contemporary culture?

4. Through the observations of Franny Primm we experience first love, the complicated mid-life love between Beck and Jack, sibling love and devotion, unfailing parental love and love damaged and twisted into something else entirely by abuse. Would you describe ONE PECULIAR SUMMER as a love story? What did you think of the relationship between Franny and Mary Coleman? Was it typical?

5. Which characters made the strongest impression on you? Why? Did you find the character of Eugene, who used the n-word, a racist, "no-count" boy or a sympathetic character? What about the yard man, Sam? Why was he reluctant to help Franny?

6. In Franny's account of her childhood, Daddy Ben reigned over his atypical family with a rigid kindness. What did you think of his actions and his views on race, class, religion and women? Was this understandable taken in the context of the time and place in which he lived?
  
7. In contemporary culture, some scenes with blacks and women are cringe-worthy. Should they (and the use of the term colored and especially the n-word) have been left out of the story? Or do they lend authenticity? Discuss the different characters' reactions in the scene in which Father Corny comes to lunch at Primm House.
  
8. Franny, Adeline and Bobby all lived in dysfunctional families, as opposed to Lee's family which seemed more relaxed and loving. Discuss the differences in the four mothers of the main characters. Were you sympathetic with Beck's "blue days" and reliance on double old-fashions? Was Verna an adequate mother substitute for Bobby? What about Eugene Harper's mother, Nadine?
  
9. Franny decides that Nancy Drew's popularity is because she embodies the best in every girl. Do you agree? Did you ever have a summer when there was a group obsession like Franny and her friends had with "all things mysterious"?
  
10. Did you think the plot and resolution of who killed Father Corny was plausible?
  
11. What did you think of the epilogue? Do you think Franny and Bobby will reunite?
  
12. Is there any significance to the name Cornelius Valdes?