

DURHAM COUNTY LIBRARY

Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

March
by
Geraldine Brooks
(New York: Penguin Books, 2006)

Author:

Australian-born Geraldine Brooks is an author and journalist who grew up in the Western suburbs of Sydney, and attended Bethlehem College Ashfield and the University of Sydney. She worked as a reporter for The Sydney Morning Herald for three years as a feature writer with a special interest in environmental issues.

In 1982 she won the Greg Shackleton Australian News Correspondents scholarship to the journalism master's program at Columbia University in New York City. Later she worked for *The Wall Street Journal*, where she covered crises in the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans.

She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 2006 for her novel *March* (2005), and her novel *Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague* (2001) is an international bestseller. Her latest novel, *People of the Book*, was published in January 2008. She is also the author of the nonfiction works *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1995) and *Foreign Correspondence: A Pen Pal's Journey from Down Under* (1998).

Brooks married author Tony Horwitz in Tourette-sur-loup, France, in 1984. Horowitz is the author of a number of nonfiction works including *Blue Latitudes*. They have two sons (Nathaniel and Bizu) and three dogs, and divide their time between homes in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and Sydney, Australia.

Summary:

From Louisa May Alcott's beloved classic *Little Women*, Geraldine Brooks has animated the character of the absent father, March, and crafted a story "filled with the ache of love and marriage and with the power of war upon the mind and heart of one unforgettable man" (Sue Monk Kidd). With "pitch-perfect writing" (*USA Today*), Brooks follows March as he leaves behind his family to aid the Union cause in the Civil War. His experiences will utterly change his marriage and challenge his most ardently held beliefs. A lushly written, wholly original tale steeped in the details of another time, *March* secures Geraldine Brooks's place as a renowned author of historical fiction.

Questions:

1. Throughout the novel, March and Marmee, although devoted to one another, seem to misunderstand each other quite a bit and often do not tell each other the complete

truth. Discuss examples of where this happens and how things may have turned out differently, for better or worse, had they been completely honest. Are there times when it is best not to tell our loved ones the truth?

2. The causes of the American Civil War were multiple and overlapping. What was your opinion of the war when you first came to the novel, and has it changed at all since reading March?
3. March's relationships with both Marmee and Grace are pivotal in his life. Discuss the differences between these two relationships and how they help to shape March, his worldview, and his future. What other people and events were pivotal in shaping March's beliefs?
4. Do you think it was the right decision for March to have supported, financially or morally, the northern abolitionist John Brown? Brown's tactics were controversial, but did the ends justify the means?
5. "If war can ever be said to be just, then this war is so; it is action for a moral cause, with the most rigorous of intellectual underpinnings. And yet everywhere I turn, I see injustice done in the waging of it," says March (p. 65). Do you think that March still believes the war is just by the end of the novel? Why or why not?
6. What is your opinion of March's enlisting? Should he have stayed home with his family? How do we decide when to put our principles ahead of our personal obligations?
7. When Marmee is speaking of her husband's enlisting in the army, she makes a very eloquent statement: "A sacrifice such as his is called noble by the world. But the world will not help me put back together what war has broken apart" (p. 210). Do her words have resonance in today's world? How are the people who fight our wars today perceived? Do you think we pay enough attention to the families of those in the military? Have our opinions been influenced at all by the inclusion of women in the military?
8. The war raged on for several years after March's return home. How do you imagine he spent those remaining years of the war? How do you think his relationship with Marmee changed? How might it have stayed the same?

Suggested Web Sites

Let's Talk About It – Durham blog: Making Sense of the Civil War
<http://ltaidurham.wordpress.com/>