



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood

1. What is the function of the epigraphs at the beginning of the novel?
2. In Gilead, women are categorized as wives, handmaids, Marthas, or Aunts, but Moira refuses to fit into a niche. Trace Moira's role throughout the story to determine what she symbolizes.
3. Aunt Lydia, Janine, and Offred's mother represent more than themselves. What do each of their characters signify? What do the style and colour of their clothes symbolize?
4. The Commander in the novel says you can't cheat nature. How do characters find ways to follow their natural instincts?
5. Babies are referred to as "a keeper," "unbabies," or "shredders." What other real or fictional worlds do these terms suggest?
6. Why is the Bible under lock and key in Gilead?
7. A palimpsest is a medieval parchment that scribes attempted to scrape clean and use again, though they were unable to obliterate all traces of the original. How does the new republic of Gilead's social order often resemble a palimpsest?
8. Atwood included historical notes at the end of the novel. Why do you think these were included, and how did they affect your interpretation of the story?
9. Margaret Atwood is often asked if the book is intended to be a feminist novel. Do you think it is? Why or why not?

The above questions were adapted from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/6125/the-handmaids-tale-by-margaret-atwood/9780385490818/readers-guide/> to enhance your discussion of the book.

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