



# Book Club in a Bag

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## *Once Upon a River* by Diane Setterfield

1. The Swan Inn, Buscot Lodge, and the towns and villages along the river Thames create a very specific atmosphere for the story that unfolds. What role does the Swan itself play? Could this story have taken place anywhere else?
2. A wedge is driven between the Vaughans as they struggle to come to terms with the loss of Amelia. In the end, what brings them together? How?
3. How does Robert Armstrong, raised outside family life in circumstances of financially cushioned neglect, turn out to be such a good man?
4. Is Lily White responsible for her actions?
5. Consider the importance of family in the novel. What does it mean to Robert Armstrong? What does family mean to Daunt and Rita? And Victor? What about Lily?
6. It's easy to get carried away talking about the key families in the plot, the Vaughans, the Armstrongs, and Lily and her brother, but what about the family at the inn? What important functions do they perform?
7. Storytelling is central to *Once Upon a River*. The story of Quietly the ferryman is an invention of the author, but it contains many elements from traditional or mythological tales. Does it remind you of any other stories in particular?
8. In the context of women's lives in the 19th century, what do you make of Rita's reluctance to marry? What brings her to reconsider?
9. The identity of the girl is one of the driving mysteries of *Once Upon a river*. What were your early thoughts about who she really was, and did they alter as the story developed? What did you think of the way this question was resolved at the end?
10. The ending elaborates on the "return to life" of children apparently drowned. Did this come as a surprise to you?

The above questions were taken from <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/once-upon-a-river-0/guide> to enhance your discussion of the book.

# Author Biography

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Diane Setterfield is a British author born in rural Berkshire. Setterfield studied French literature at the University of Bristol. She taught English at the Institut Universitaire de Technologie and the Ecole nationale supérieure de chimie in France. She left academia in the late 1990s to pursue a career in writing.

<https://www.dianesetterfield.com/profile/>

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