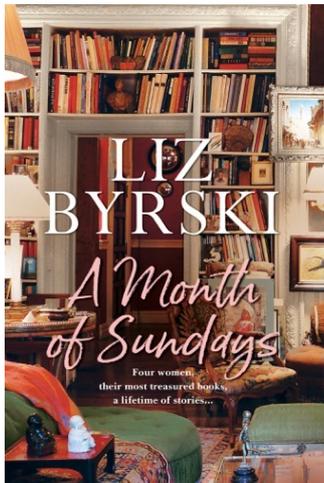


BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION POINTS



Thank you for choosing *A Month of Sundays* for your book club. I do hope you enjoy reading the book.

Here are some discussion points you may like to use.

The characters

Which character did you identify with the most? Why? Which character do you think is the most likeable?

Although told from multiple perspectives, do you think there's a main character? If so, who, and why?

While all four women form a close friendship as a group, we can see that Ros and Simone have their own unique relationship, as do Judy and Adele. Particularly in the case of Ros and Simone who are perhaps the most perceptibly different in personality, why and how do you think these pairings occurred?

'I think he'll be fine, she says, talking silently to James as she frequently does. It's a relief, I hate the idea of having to organise a new tenant again, but he seems easy and Leah wouldn't have sent me a dud.' (6). What do you think the purpose and significance of Ros' conversations with James are to our understanding of Ros as a character, and also to the narrative itself?

A lot can be said of a novel's setting playing as significant a role as a character within the story. How true do you think this is of the Blue Mountains in the story? Does it play a significant role? Could the story have taken place in any environment to the same effect?

'So much seems to have shifted since then. I've changed, she thinks. Just being here with these three women has changed me.' (201). What do you think are the main contributing factors that have allowed these women to come away from this experience so changed?

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION POINTS

Feminism

There is an undercurrent of feminist sentiment throughout the novel. For instance, when discussing *Tirra Lirra by the River* the group considers the trend in literary prizes being awarded to male authors over female. And their final act as a group is to create a support network for each other – a ‘sisterhood’ (329). Simone also suggests, they (could this be specifically directed at the four women, or a collective ‘they’ of all women?) share an underlying problem, which is that they have all conformed to roles dictated to them by some institutionalised authority – ‘... we all have the same problem ... We’re nice. We’re all nice women. We are too nice. We’ve spent our lives doing what’s expected of us.’ (304-305).

To what extent would you agree with Simone’s statement that this is a problem they all share? Do you think this is an underlying factor of all their struggles? What do you believe the issues, shared or individually, are?

They also discuss the omnipresent issue regarding women: aging and appearance. While Simone is an immaculate dresser, ‘casually fashionable like an advert for Country Road’ (67), Adele has contemplated cosmetic surgery and has only just stopped dyeing her hair. For Adele, ‘Every woman she knows seems to think that the most important thing is to stay young and hide any signs of age’ (73).

Do you think this is still an issue that pervades society? Has there been a change over time? What makes Simone so comfortable with aging, and Adele so fearful?

Interestingly, in their individual family units there are no prominent male figures. Yes, all the women are single, but this theme is also evident within the parent-child relationships – Ros’ de-facto daughter is James’ niece Leah; Adele’s daughter Jenna was the result of a fling; Simone’s son Adam, was conceived via artificial insemination, and while Judy has no children her relationship with Ted and Donna is less than conventional.

What are your thoughts on this similarity? Do you think this was deliberate? And if so, what do you think the purpose is?

What do you think of the waiter’s remark, “Enjoy your meal, girls,” he says with a big grin. “All on a diet, are we?” (273), to which Ros responds, “Just sod off, you fatuous, sexist twit”?

Was it an overreaction and an example of political correctness gone mad? Or was Ros’ response warranted?

Identity and vulnerability

All four women converge at moments in their lives when they’re experiencing some sort of identity crisis. What is the crisis for each woman?

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION POINTS

'It's not so long ago that she would have done that without thinking twice, but today she'd come face to face with the fear of her own vulnerability.' (Ros, 280).

Inextricably tied to their questions of identity is a sense of vulnerability. How significant a factor do you think vulnerability plays in all their lives? What are their vulnerabilities?

When Judy confesses to Ros that she feels detached from the news of Maddie's death, Ros hits upon an interesting concept of 'emotional conservation', that is, 'conserving motional energy. Saving it for ourselves and for people whom we're really close to.' (242).

What do you think of this concept? Is it universal? Is it a healthy coping mechanism?

Women, reading and book clubs

'There were six original members, and it had grown slowly to sixteen – sixteen women in locations around the country . . . Now it has shrunk to just four.' (8).

Why do you think these four seemingly very different women have continued with the book club?

Have you read any of the characters' personal book choices? If so, which character's response aligned most closely with your own?

Over their book club discussions, they've all reflected on various aspects of the reading experience. Two interesting ideas that emerge come from Adele, 'I also wonder if one just becomes a slightly more sophisticated reader with age', (107) and Judy 'I do believe it's true that we all bring something of ourselves to what we read . . . I wonder what personal baggage you might be bringing to this very lovely book.' (187).

Do you agree with Adele's suggestion that age makes for a more sophisticated reader? And in response to Judy's observation of the reading experience, do you think it's possible to read a book objectively, without bringing your own baggage?

Of the book clubs you've personally experienced, what elements have worked and what elements have not? Discuss.

In their discussion of *Unless* they examine an author's ability to direct the reader and present things in the way they want, to include and exclude details as they see fit, in order to create a specific response. Are there any storylines or unresolved issues you would have liked to see addressed in the story that weren't?

The criteria for each member's personal choice is a book that tells the others something significant about them, it's an invitation to get to know them better – and so in this spirit, what would your choice be? And, of course, why?