

A GALLERY
READERS
GROUP GUIDE

LISI HARRISON

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
OF THE CLIQUE SERIES

The Dirty Book Club

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BOOKS

This reading group guide for *The Dirty Book Club* includes an introduction, discussion questions, ideas for enhancing your book club, and a Q&A with author Lisi Harrison. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

**YOU KNOW YOU
WANT TO JOIN.**





INTRODUCTION

M. J. Stark seems to have it all—her dream job as a magazine editor, a sexy doctor boyfriend, and an exciting life in Manhattan—only it’s just an illusion. In reality, she’s still reeling from loneliness after losing her parents and sister. So when a promotion doesn’t go her way and her boyfriend suggests moving out to Pearl Beach, California, to be with him, she jumps at the chance: only to discover that life in California isn’t all beaches and sunshine.

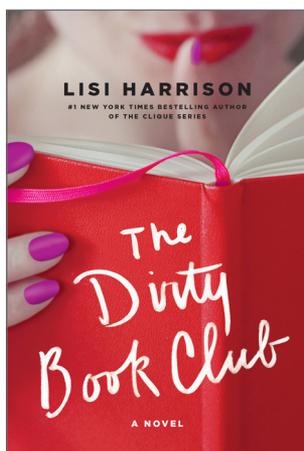
When M.J. finds a mysterious envelope from her elderly neighbor, Gloria, with an invitation to inherit a “dirty book club” started by Gloria and her friends in the 1960s, she and three other women chosen by the original members may just have found a lifeline. As M.J. and the other women bond, each is challenged to rethink her life. Inspired by the women who recruited them, the women in the present-day Dirty Book Club find courage through the power of their burgeoning friendship.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. As *The Dirty Book Club* begins, the narrator tells the reader that for Gloria Golden, “Potluck Fridays weren’t really about making the most of her newly renovated kitchen” (page 3). Why are Potluck Fridays so important to Gloria? Why is she wary to admit the true reason that she looks forward to them? Do you think, as Gloria does, that she “had no business being sour”? Why or why not?
2. In a letter to the next generation of the Dirty Book Club, the founding members write, “A dirty martini will make you admit things to other people, but a dirty book? That will make you admit things to yourself” (page 104). Discuss this statement. What, if anything, do the DBC members discover about themselves as a result of their reading selections? Did you find any of their discoveries particularly shocking? If so, why?
3. Describe the women whom Gloria and her friends choose to carry on the tradition of the Dirty Book Club. Given how different each of the women are from one another, did you think that the DBC would last? Why or why not? Why do you think these particular women were selected by Gloria and her friends?
4. Gloria tells M.J., “[E]very day we’re alive is a special occasion” (page 54). Do you agree with her? What do you think M.J.’s life philosophy is when she first meets Gloria? Compare it with Gloria’s. In what ways are the two women alike? Were you surprised by Gloria’s actions toward M.J.? Which ones and why?
5. Addie defines love as “accepting someone for who they are, not for who they’ll be once you change them” (page 180). How do each of the other women in the Dirty Book Club define love? How would you describe it? Discuss the relationships in *The Dirty Book Club*. Which ones, if any, exemplify your definition of love?

6. M.J. looks on as Gloria giggles with Liddy and Dotty during Leo's shiva, "amazed by Gloria's lightness during such a dark time," and wonders "[w]ere her friendships that strong, or had her relationship with Leo been that weak?" (page 77). What do you think? Describe Gloria's friendships with her friends. How have they helped one another get through difficult times? Do you have any friends like Liddy and Dotty? Tell your book club about them.
7. Liddy's actions lead to the disbanding of the Dirty Book Club in 1987. What does Liddy do that causes the other members to lose the ability to trust her? Were you surprised by their reaction to her disclosure? Do you agree that she betrayed the other members of the book club? Explain your answer.
8. Describe M.J.'s relationship with Dan. Do you think that they were well suited for each other? During an argument, M.J. tells Dan that he "sold me on a life that doesn't exist" (page 197). Is M.J. right? What kind of life was she expecting in California? What were her reasons for moving there?
9. How do the book selections of the Dirty Book Club aid in your understanding of the club's participants? Have you read any of the DBC's selections? If so, what did you think of them?
10. What was your first impression of Addie Oliver? Did you like her? Why or why not? Did your feelings about her change during the course of the novel? If they did, talk with your book club about what made you change your mind.
11. When Marjorie is critical of Gloria for that "'I can't confab about Leo' thing," Gloria responds that she's married. Do you agree with Gloria that "being husband and wife...is different than going steady in high school" (page 8)? Are Gloria's friends wrong to expect the same level of intimacy with Gloria now that she's married? If so, why?

12. At Addie's party, M.J. reminds herself that Dr. Cohn, her psychologist, has said "recovery was about progress, not perfection" (page 153). Do you agree with Dr. Cohn? Do you think that M.J. is on her way to a full recovery? How has M.J.'s past influenced her current behavior? Did you notice any signs that she was on her way to healing? If so, talk with your book club about them.
13. When M.J. tells Gloria that Dan is her best friend, Gloria's response is, "Now that's a problem" (page 65). Discuss Gloria's statement. Do you agree with her that it's problematic for Dan to be filling the role of best friend for M.J.? Do you think that a romantic partner can fulfill the same needs as a best friend? Why does Gloria think that the two roles should be separate?
14. Although M.J. "didn't have to do it all," she did. "Work was her escape" (page 29). What is M.J. using work to escape from? Do you think her coping mechanism is a healthy one?
15. M.J. views Gayle's decision about changes in City's management as a betrayal. Why does she have this perspective? Do you agree with M.J., or do you think that Gayle is genuinely trying to do "what's best for the magazine" (page 39)? Explain your answer.



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ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. If you haven't read the Dirty Book Club's selections, pick one as a group and discuss it at your next book club meeting. Do you have the same reaction to the book as the characters in *The Dirty Book Club* do? Does reading about their discussions change the experience for you? If so, how?
2. Often an individual's name has an interesting history. For example, M.J.'s full name is May-June. Like the rest of her family, she was named after her birth month—or birth months. As M.J. tells Dan, "I was born at 11:59 p.m. on May 31, so they gave me June [as a name], too" (page 43). Discuss the importance of names with your book club. Why did your parents choose to name you as they did? If you have children, do your children's names have any special significance?
3. Leo bemoans the current state of films, telling M.J., "I was a producer at Paramount for forty-eight years. Back when people who loved films made films" (page 60). Watch some films from Hollywood's Golden Age with your book club and discuss them. Which films are your favorites? How do these films compare to Hollywood's current offerings? Do you agree with Leo that movies today simply are not as good as they were during the Golden Age of Hollywood? Why or why not?

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