



The Pull of the Stars

By Emma Donoghue

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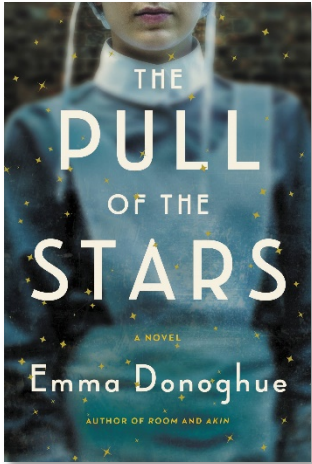
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The Pull of the Stars

Discussion Questions



Author: Emma Donoghue
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LGBT Fiction

1. During the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, many people referred to the 1918 Spanish flu as a touchpoint. What was your awareness of the 1918 flu before the 2020 pandemic? How important is an understanding of history when we deal with similar crises in the present?
2. Julia and the other health workers face many challenges, including lack of supplies, misinformation, and sexism. Which of those challenges were unique to Julia's time and place? To what extent do our health-care workers face the same challenges today?
3. Throughout *The Pull of the Stars*, Julia notices government placards with public health warnings and advice. Why do you think Emma Donoghue included them in the novel? Were your government's efforts to communicate with the general public during the coronavirus pandemic similar to those in the novel, or different?
4. War in several senses—the First World War in which Tim Power served, and the Irish revolutionary struggle in which Dr. Lynn is a leader—is the context to *The Pull of Stars*. What effect do these distant conflicts have on the story and atmosphere of the novel? Why is war kept mostly in the background rather than in the foreground?
5. Julia argues that women pay “the blood tax” just as much as soldiers. What did you think about the detailed scenes that depicted childbirth and its complications? How do you think birth functions as a source of plot compared with the flu?
6. In the novel, the expectant mothers have very different family situations and relations and relationships with their children. Which patient did you identify with the most? Which patient's story was the most surprising to you?
7. How does status of “immunity” function in the novel?
8. What does Bridie Sweeney bring into Julia's life? Into the novel as a whole?
9. What effect does the slow of revelation of her background have on your sense of other characters, institutions, and Ireland's history?
10. How does it change your response to a character in a novel such as Kathleen Lynn when you learn that she was a historical figure? What does an author owe to a real person when fictionalizing them?

Author Bio

Born in Dublin in 1969, Emma Donoghue is an Irish emigrant twice over; she spent eight years in Cambridge doing a PhD in eighteenth-century literature before moving to London, Ontario, where she lives with her partner and their two children. She also migrates between genres, writing literary history, biography, and stage and radio plays as well as fairy tales and short stories. She is best known for her novels, which range from historical (*The Wonder*, *Slammerkin*, *Life Mask*, *Landing*, *The Sealed Letter*) to the contemporary (*Akin*, *Stir-Fry*, *Hood*, *Landing*). Her international bestseller *Room* was a *New York Times* Best Book of 2010 and was finalist for the Man Booker, Commonwealth, and Orange prizes. Her screen adaptation, directed by Lenny Abrahamson, was nominated for four Academy Awards.

For more information, visit emmadonoghue.com.

How to Lead a Book Group

I. **Getting started**

Ask each person to say their name and give their initial brief thoughts about the book. This will help to break the ice and give everyone a chance to participate in the initial discussion.

II. **Guidelines for Participants**

- a. *Format* - After asking each member of the group for their name and initial thoughts, follow with discussion questions, then author biographical information.
- b. *Interruptions* - There will always be someone who breaks in while another person is speaking. Most interruptions are due to enthusiasm rather than rudeness. Control the interruptions by saying, "Hold that thought, Sheryl, we'll want to hear it again once Angie has finished."
- c. *Monopolizing Conversation* - Cut in on long-winded group members with, "That's an interesting point you just made. Did anyone else get the same impression or a different one?" or "You've made some interesting points, Teri. Let's hear from another reader. Chris, what did you think?"
- d. *Keeping the group on topic* - Try not to let attendees wander off topic and bring them back if they do.
- e. *Listen carefully to what is said by participants* - Rephrase a participant's comments or ask a question to be sure you and others understand what was meant.
- f. *Allow everyone the chance to contribute to the discussion* - Engage silent attendees by posing open-ended questions directly. But don't badger the participants who really don't want to participate. Try asking them, "What did you like/dislike about the book?"
- g. *Ask open-ended questions* - if you ask a question that can be answered with a "yes" or "no", all you'll get is a one-word answer.

III. **As the facilitator, think of yourself as an umpire.** It's your job to make sure everyone has the opportunity to respectfully share his or her opinion with the group. You do not have to agree or disagree with every statement made.

IV. **Other questions** (if the discussion is stalled):

- a. How does the title reflect the book?
- b. Would you recommend this book? Why or why not? If yes, what would you say about it?
- c. What was your favorite part?
- d. Who was your favorite character?
- e. What messages are in the book, if any?
- f. What did the book make you think about?
- g. How did the book make you feel?

Book Group in a Box FAQ

- **One of my group members forgot to return their book - who is responsible?**

The person who borrows a Book Group in a Box kit is responsible for the return of the kit and all of its contents.

- **Can my group members return their copies to the library?**

No, the entire Book Group in a Box kit must be returned at the same time.

- **How long is the loan period?**

Kits are checked out for a period of six weeks. A fine of \$1 per day will be assessed for books or kits returned after the due date.

- **Are Book Group in a Box kits renewable?**

No, kits are not renewable.

- **What if a book is lost?**

If your group loses a book, a \$15 replacement fee will be billed. You may replace the book with a new copy within 7 days to avoid the bill.

- **May I place a hold on a Book Group in a Box from the Library catalog?**

Yes, all Book Group in a Box kits can be requested using the library's online catalog. Call Telephone Reference: 310-434-2608 if you need assistance placing a request.

- **What if my group needs more copies than are in the box?**

Use the library's catalog to request more individual copies of a title as needed.

- **Someone in my group prefers audiobooks, how can I help them?**

Use the library's catalog to find the title in an alternative format such as a book on CD, e-audiobook, or e-book.

- **Can my book group suggest titles for the Book Group in a Box collection?**

Yes. E-mail your suggestion to bookgroupinabox@santamonica.gov, or contact a Library service desk for assistance.