



Book Club in a Bag

The Donnellys by James Reaney

1. Discuss the significance of the title of each play in the trilogy. How do the titles echo the themes of the plays?
2. What did you like about reading a play as opposed to a book? Was there anything challenging about reading a play?
3. Describe the main characters including personality traits, motivations, and inner qualities.
4. The mother, Johannah, in *Handcuffs*, is cast as a warrior queen with endurance and fortitude. She gives her son a fiddle on his 12th birthday as she believes in Canada they are “free as it is to play all tunes.” Discuss her character and her hopes for life in Canada for her family.
5. This trilogy tells the story of a Protestant Irish family that emigrates from Ireland only to find their new home is also divided by religion. The play traces the feud through the generations. Discuss the challenges the Donnellys faced. Can you make any modern-day comparisons?
6. How is the tragic ending foreshadowed in the trilogy?
7. Does the dialogue seem realistic? Does each character speak in a particular dialogue? Does any character stand out to you and why?
 - NOTE: The trilogy had the same fourteen actors who played the various roles. How would this impact your interpretation of the play?
8. If you were to produce this play, what would you envision for the set, lighting, music, etc.?
9. In the program note of *Handcuffs*, Reaney wrote: “It’s hard to handcuff wheat.’ Vitality, courage, and determination will prevail, despite repression and brutality, or the ‘mind-forged manacles’ of bigotry and ignorance.” Discuss the significance of this statement.

The above questions were taken from <http://english.unl.edu/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/Drama%20Questions.htm> and <http://www.canadiantheatre.com/dict.pl?term=The%20Donnellys> to enhance your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Born near Stratford, Ontario, James Reaney is a Canadian poet and playwright whose work examined small-town life in Ontario. He received a Master and Doctoral degree in English from the University of Toronto. He became an officer of the Order of Canada in 1976 and was elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1978.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/james-crerar-reaney>

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