



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

The Pull of the Stars by Emma Donoghue

1. According to the authors note, Emma Donoghue began this story in 2018, and delivered the final draft in March 2020. Her publishers fast tracked the release of the book. Did you find the subject of this book made it difficult to read? Or were you drawn in to discover the reactions to a pandemic more than 100 years ago?
2. How did you enjoy the characters and their personality traits? Were you drawn to any one character for example, the historical figure, activist, physician, and feminist Dr. Kathleen Lynn?
3. The medical attitudes and procedures described in this novel were known to be practiced during this era. What did you think of the detailed scenes describing childbirth and its complications?
4. A current review of this novel has suggested that the author has given us our first pandemic *caregiver* novel stating: “an engrossing and inadvertently topical story about health care workers inside small rooms fighting to preserve life. Would you agree with this statement and why?
5. What effect does the revelation of Bridie Sweeney background have on the story? Were you surprised at the closeness and friendship she shared with Julia?
6. Throughout the book, Julia reads public health warnings posted by the government. How do these notices compare to the ones given during the 2020 pandemic?
7. During the novel, we learn the backgrounds and family situations and relationships of the expectant mothers. Which of their stories did you most identify with? Which was the most surprising to you?
8. Julia’s brother Tim served in the First World War and suffers with his own demons. How does this story and the relationship between the siblings add to the novel?

The above questions were developed by Clarington Library, Museums & Archives staff to enhance your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Emma Donoghue was born on October 24, 1969 in Dublin, Ireland. She received her BA degree from the University College Dublin and PhD in English from University of Cambridge. Her first novel was *Stir*. Her next novel was *Hood* which won the 1997 American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Book Award for Literature. Her novel *Slammerkin* was a finalist in the 2001 Irish Times Irish Literature Prize for Fiction. *The Sealed Letter*, published in 2008, is a work of historical fiction. This work was the joint winner of the 2009 Lambda Literary Award for Lesbian Fiction. She continued writing several award-winning novels including *Room* which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in September 2010. Some of her other works include *Astray*, *Three and a Half Deaths*, and *Frog Music*. – *Bowker Author Information*

Author Website: <http://www.emmadonoghue.com/>

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