



BOOK CLUB



"The Measure of Gold"

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

Why does Penelope decide to go to Paris? What does it say about her sense of home and belonging? What does it say about her relationship with Naomie?

5

What do Isaac Newton's papers and the magical stone signify in the novel? How does Penelope's understanding of Newton's principles affect her own choices?

2

Before the war, Paris had been a major center of culture and arts. After the German invasion, everything changed in an instant. In what ways does Penelope's journey parallel the journey of the city of Paris?

6

Describe Penelope's relationship with Lucien. How does it change through the course of the war? Is he a good partner for Penelope? Why or why not? Do you see him as a protagonist or an antagonist?

3

Who is Fulcanelli? Why does he want the stone? What are his motives concerning Penelope? What happens to Fulcanelli?

7

Why does Penelope decide to leave Paris to train as a spy in London? How would her life have been different had she stayed in Paris or in Tennessee?

4

In what ways is the stone alive? How do the stone's unusual attributes play into the alchemical themes?

8

What does it mean for Penelope to be a female spy in WWII? How is her status as a woman an advantage? How is it a disadvantage?

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What is the significance of Beethoven in the novel? How does Penelope's relationship with Beethoven change the course of her journey? What do the birds symbolize?

10

When Penelope leaves London, she is warned, "Be careful there (in Paris). You must already know that the life expectancy of an SOE recruit in the field is only six weeks." Members of the Resistance faced many risks in pursuit of justice. Meanwhile, the Vichy government continued to carry out the Nazi's brutal agenda. At the brothel, Penelope finds herself caught between those two moral extremes. What does she come to understand about the prostitutes and their 'horizontal collaboration'? How does that mirror France's predicament during the war?

11

What does the brothel teach Penelope about human nature? How does she change during her time there? What does it symbolize when she transitions from maid to dancer?

12

"She was beginning to understand why Newton avoided love, the heart often aiming higher than the actions of humans." How do Penelope's observations about Isaac Newton shape her world? How do they shape her relationship with Fulcanelli and Lucien? What is Penelope's relationship with love?

13

"Betrayal, it was the most solitary word of all, beyond abandonment, beyond torture, beyond hatred. It was the human act that cut the most deeply, splintering north from south and east from west." How do the Nazis use betrayal to meet their objectives in the war? Why does Lucien betray Penelope? How does his betrayal change her? What other betrayals do we see in the novel?

14

The influence of mathematics, dance, and music is so important to Penelope? How do science and the arts play into the downfall of the lieutenant? Why does Penelope kill the Lieutenant? What does it say about her? What does it say about the relationship between love and war?

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15

What is the significance of Notre Dame in the novel? How does Gothic architecture relate to the theme of alchemy? What do the lessons of Gothic architecture teach Penelope?

18

What happens to Lucien? Why does he never write back? How do the war and his trauma inform his disappearance? What happens to Newton's papers? The stone?

16

What is the significance of the golden pill? How does it change Lucien? What is the significance of the theme of gold in the novel? How is gold transformative and transcendent in the novel?

19

Why did Penelope lose her voice? How is it significant that Vesperale is raised by a mother with no voice? Discuss the symbolism of blindness in the novel.

17

Why does Penelope leave France? How were women scapegoated for the collaboration? Why? What do the stories about how so many French women were treated after D-Day say about human nature?

20

What is the meaning of the title?