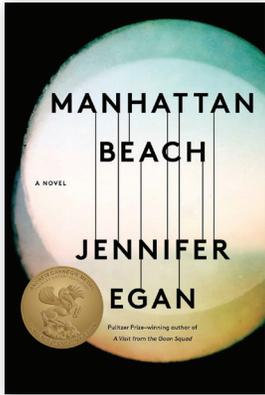


Andrew Carnegie

Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction



2018 FICTION WINNER

Manhattan Beach
by Jennifer Egan
published by Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster

Jennifer Egan's many-faceted historical novel set in Depression-era New York City encompasses a struggling family; gangsters, including a nightclub impresario; a young woman working at the Brooklyn Naval Yard during World War II who breaks the gender barrier to learn to dive; and the crew of a doomed merchant marine ship in the Pacific.

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How does the opening scene with young Anna Kerrigan barefoot on the cold beach foreshadow things to come?
2. How does the predicament of Anna's severely disabled sister, Lydia, and the emotions of their mother, Agnes, propel the actions taken by Anna and their father, Eddie?
3. Discuss Dexter Styles as both a typical and atypical gangster figure.
4. Both the realm of gangsters and the naval shipyard are tightly run and strictly ordered. What contrasts does Egan draw between the underworld and the military? And how does ambition, rebellion, independence, and risk play out in each for Egan's characters?
5. What glimpses into the wartime lives of young women does Egan illuminate through the different approaches to shipyard work enacted by intrepid Anna, Rose, a "married," and party girl Nell?
6. Egan conducted extensive, even, forgive the pun, immersive research into the history of naval diving, even trying on one of the era's 200-pound diving suits. What does such authentic detail bring to the novel? How does the way Egan combines technical precision with lyrical, metaphorical descriptions of the sea add dimension to these scenes?
7. What do the contrasts in attitude toward men and women at the shipyard reveal about 1940s society? How does this contrast with our own time? Consider the same in the scenes in which Egan brings together men of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds in that rigidly segregated time versus now.

Cont. on next page

BOOK GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE CONT.

8. The shipwreck scenes have a classic feel, think Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville. What does this story line bring to the overall novel? How does it relate or contrast with the shipyard scenes? The final chapter in the gangster tale?
9. What do the fates of Dexter and Eddie reflect in terms of the pressures men faced in a time of economic desperation when they had families to support?
10. What does Egan achieve, ultimately, in combining aspects of a noir thriller with historical fiction set in a time of such radical sacrifice, change, and daring?

INTERESTED IN STARTING A BOOK GROUP?

The American Library Association offers resources on how to get started, how to structure a meeting, how to select books and how to facilitate a meaningful literary discussion.

For more information visit <http://libguides.ala.org/bookdiscussiongroups>.

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