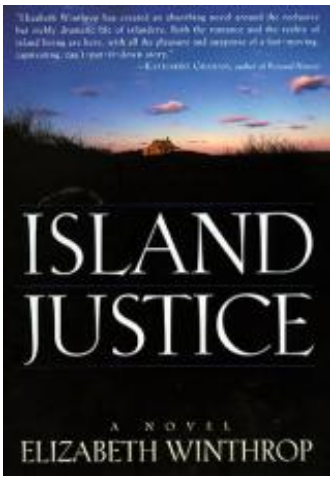
ReadingGroupGuides
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Island Justice

by Elizabeth Winthrop



About the Book

In this compelling, evocative novel set on a small island off the New England coast, Elizabeth Winthrop subtly examines our notions of home.

For Maggie Hammond, home means her beloved godmother, so when Nan dies, the Victorian house she inhabited becomes merely a possession for Maggie to shed. Bur when she meets Sam, the island naturalist, and a dead body rolls up on her beach, she finds herself drawn deeper and deeper into the complex world of the island's winter community.

For Anna Craven, married to an abusive bully, home is fraught with danger and shrouded in secrets. As Anna grows closer to Dennis Lacey, the newly arrived island doctor, gossip flies and the domestic problems long hidden behind closed doors erupt into violence. The tightly knit group of year-rounders are forced to examine the erosive undertow of secrecy that threatens to destroy the island community they call home.

A beautifully observed novel in the tradition of Anne Tyler and Alice Hoffman, Island Justice sets Maggie's struggle to trust the pulls of her heart against the backdrop of a community intent on pursuing its own unique brand of justice.

Discussion Guide

1. In **Island Justice** the author seems to be presenting us with two women in different stages in their lives. Compare the characters and the life circumstances of Anna Craven and Maggie Hammond. In what ways are they different and in what ways do they resemble each other?

2. What is the meaning of the title?

3. The story is related from the point of view of an omniscient narrator. How does this affect your concept of the

characters and your understanding of their daily lives? If the author had chosen to tell this story from one person's point of view, how would that decision have changed the story?

4. Some people have called Sam Matera, the naturalist, the hero of this book. Do you agree? How does the author relate the natural ecosystem of a New England island to the problems of the human community? What is the meaning of the last sentence of the book?

5. In an interview, the author has said that in every one of her heroes there is a villain, and in every villain there is a hero. Do you find this to be true of her characters? Discuss this concept in connection with Lauren Root, Al Craven, Sam Matera, and Dennis Lacey.

6. What message was Nan Phipps trying to give to her goddaughter, Maggie, when she willed her the large Victorian house? Does Maggie ever get the message?

7. Al Craven is proud of the fact that he never hits his wife, Anna. Why is this so important to him? Do you think Anna is an abused woman? How does Erin's parents' relationship affect her?

8. There are many secondary characters peopling this book -- Chuck Montclair, Miss Yola, Lauren Root, the Tremayne boys, Dennis Lacey. What role does each of them serve? If the author decided to write another novel about one of these people, who would you advise her to choose and why?

9. Why do you think the author chose not to give this island a name or pinpoint its geographical location?

10. The islanders are proud of their insularity. We take care of our own, they are fond of saying. Do you think their form of justice is more or less effective than the legal systems available to those of us who live on the "mainland"? Why?

11. The author is writing about a place that is cut off from the mainland, but is also, in many ways, cut off from itself. What do you think the author is saying about community?

12. In any part of your life -- work, home, church, your book group --- do you live in an insular community like this one? How is it the same as the community in Island Justice? How is it different?

Author Bio

Elizabeth Winthrop is the author of **In My Mothers' House**. Her Short fiction has appeared in *Best American Short Stories* and *Fiction 100*. Twice a winner of the PEN Syndicated Fiction Award, she is also the author of over forty books for children, including the highly acclaimed novel **The Castle in the Attic** She lives in New York City.

Critical Praise

" Elizabeth Winthropenvokes brilliantly the insularity of island after the rivh summer people return to their cities. I could

feel the damp, hear the waves, and smell the low tide. "

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