ReadingGroupGuides
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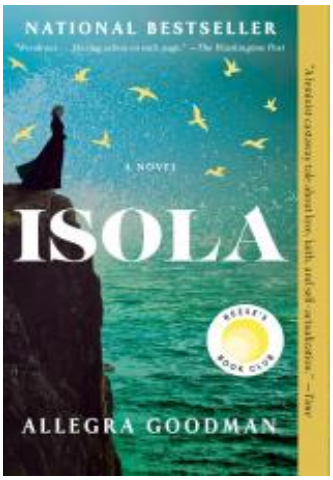
Isola

by Allegra Goodman



About the Book

A young woman and her lover are marooned on an island in this ?lushly painted? (*People*) epic saga of love, faith and defiance from the bestselling author of SAM.

Heir to a fortune, Marguerite is destined for a life of prosperity and gentility. Then she is orphaned, and her guardian --- an enigmatic and volatile man --- spends her inheritance and insists she accompany him on an expedition to New France. That journey takes an unexpected turn when Marguerite, accused of betrayal, is brutally punished and abandoned on a small island.

Once a child of privilege who dressed in gowns and laced pearls in her hair, Marguerite finds herself at the mercy of nature. As the weather turns, blanketing the island in ice, she discovers a faith she?d never before needed.

Inspired by the real life of a 16th-century heroine, ISOLA is the timeless story of a woman fighting for survival.

Discussion Guide

1. ISOLA is inspired by the real life of a 16th-century heroine. If you could ask the real Marguerite one question, what would you ask?

2. ?Everything we treasure has a price. And everything we have will slip away.? Reflect on how this quote encapsulates the themes of loss and resilience in Marguerite?s story. How does she cope with the continuous loss of her possessions and loved ones?

3. How does Marguerite?s relationship with her guardian shape her journey and her perception of power and control? How does it affect her sense of identity and autonomy?

4. Where do different characters draw the line between loyalty and self-preservation?

5. ?I cannot fly. I cannot swim. I cannot escape my island.? How does Marguerite?s sense of entrapment evolve throughout the novel? Discuss the physical and emotional aspects of her isolation.

6. What does THE BOOK OF THE CITY OF LADIES teach Marguerite --- and the other female characters? In what ways does Marguerite embody the qualities of these historical and mythical figures?

7. In what ways is Marguerite a product of her era? In what ways did she strike you as more modern?

8. How does Marguerite?s faith evolve over time?

9. What scenes from the book will stay with you the longest?

10. What other themes did you notice in the novel?

11. Marguerite?s bear claw is her ?proof? that she survived on the island. What else does this totem symbolize for her?

12. Isola celebrates the power of the natural world. Share a personal experience where you felt the immense power or beauty of nature. How did it affect you?

13. Before her time on the island, Marguerite is constantly depending on others --- their knowledge, their patronage, their kindness --- for her survival. How does her situation compare to your own life, and the lives of the modern era?

14. ?My own life was what I hoped he?d grant me,? Marguerite thinks. Discuss the significance of this quote in the context of Marguerite?s struggle for independence. How does her desire for control over her own life drive her actions and decisions?

15. Do you think Roberval was brought to any sort of justice? Why or why not?

16. Imagine you were marooned on an island like Marguerite. What three items would you want to have with you for survival, and why?

Author Bio

Allegra Goodman?s new book is THIS IS NOT ABOUT US. Her novels include ISOLA (a Reese's Book Club pick), SAM (a "Read with Jenna" Book Club selection), THE CHALK ARTIST (winner of the Massachusetts Book Award), INTUITION, THE COOKBOOK COLLECTOR, PARADISE PARK and KAATERSKILL FALLS (a National Book Award finalist).

Her fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere and has been anthologized in *The O. Henry Awards* and *Best American Short Stories.* She has written two collections of stories, THE FAMILY MARKOWITZ and TOTAL IMMERSION, and a novel for younger readers, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. Her essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe* and *The American Scholar*.

Raised in Honolulu, Goodman studied English and philosophy at Harvard and received a PhD in English literature from Stanford. She is the recipient of a Whiting Writer?s Award, the Salon Award for Fiction, and a fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced study. She lives with her family in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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