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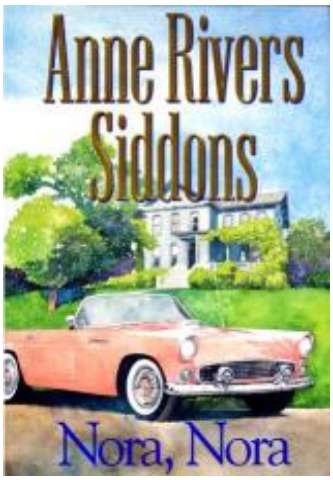
Nora, Nora

by Anne Rivers Siddons



About the Book

> "I set this story back in my own dreaming, small-town South, in my own time, 1961: that suspended time swung between two epochs that shaped America for good and all. I think I chose it because that turbulent transition was the greatest epiphany of my life, a crossing from the sweet, insular world I knew to another one, volatile and frightening and yet entirely necessary and right."

Raised by her emotionally distant, widowed father, and their housekeeper, Peyton McKenzie has become a shy tomboy with a terrible secret. Her only outlet is The Losers' Club, where she and her fellow outcasts top one another with their day's humiliations. Though she knows it can't go on forever, Peyton is not ready to give up her only source of friends. At the cusp of becoming a woman, young Peyton is desperate to hold onto her childhood. Her prim Aunt Augusta, however, thinks it is high time she became a proper young Southern lady, and is about to introduce Peyton to the hateful world of hair stylists and party dresses. And then Peyton's long lost cousin, Nora, blows into town driving a hot pink convertible, and proceeds to turn the sheltered world of Lytton, Georgia, on its head. The Civil Rights Movement has passed Lytton by, and Nora, fresh from a wild life on the road, is hell-bent on shaking things up. She is a blast of fresh air, revitalizing the entire McKenzie household, and captivating the young Peyton. But Nora is a dangerous role model. She, too, has a dark secret in her past. When the truth is revealed, it stuns the quiet town, and teaches Peyton the necessity, and the price, of love.

Discussion Guide

1. What role does Nana play in Peyton's life? Does she have special powers, or is she simply losing her mind? What is The Sight? Why does Nana fear Nora? Is she right to do so? Does your opinion of Nana change through the course of the novel?

2. Why do you think desegregation has passed Lytton by? How has the Civil Rights movement impacted the town? In what ways is the McKenzie household a part of the changing times, and in what ways is it still a holdover from earlier days?

3. How would you characterize Peyton's relationship with Boot? Why do you think she never plays with him when he visits her kitchen?

4. What does Peyton derive from her membership in The Losers' Club? Do you think the Club's practice of competing for the title of "Loser" is healthy? How does Nora's arrival in town effect the Club? What ultimately causes the Club to fall apart? When does Peyton no longer need the Club?

5. When Peyton emerges from the bathroom stall at Rich's, having vomited all over her new dress, she encounters a malevolent stare from a black bathroom attendant. Peyton wants to shout, "This is not me; don't think I'm like this! They did this to me, but I can undo it all . . . " What does she mean by, "this is not me"? Can Peyton, "undo it all"? What does Peyton learn about? race relations from her cousin Nora?

6. What is your first impression of Nora? Do you trust her? Does your opinion of her change through the course of the novel? How so? What sort of a role model is she for Peyton? When we first meet Nora, her voice is described as, "slow and rich as cooling fudge, with a little hill of laughter in it." Does that description make sense to you? What aspect of Nora does it capture?

7. Peyton, her father, and Nora each have a terrible secret in their past. How does each of them cope differently? To whom do they confide? What price do they pay for keeping their secrets? What price do they pay when they are revealed? What might they have done differently?

8. What parallels are there between Nora, Nora and Siddons's earlier novel, Peachtree Road? How is Nora like Lucy Bondurant? How is she different? How does Nora avoid Lucy's fate? In what ways does Peyton resemble Sheppard Gibbs Bondurant III? How do both novels depict the Civil Rights Movement? Why do you think Siddons chose to write a second novel about Atlanta, Georgia in the early 1960's? Do you think Siddons' attitudes have changed since she wrote Peachtree Road twelve years ago?

9. What do you think Siddons means when she describes the time period of *Nora, Nora* as being, "a crossing from the sweet, insular world I knew to another one, volatile and frightening and yet entirely necessary and right"? Is she speaking of Peyton's journey, or America's? Or both?

10. Why does Peyton replay her family's home movies when she is upset? How do they soothe her? When are the films no longer enough to comfort her?

11. Is Frazier McKenzie a good father? In what ways does he succeed as a single parent? How does he fail? How does he change during Nora's stay? What does Nora teach him about love?

12. How do you feel about Nora's use of foul language? Why do you think Siddons gives her such a dirty tongue? What does Nora's obscenities tell about her character? How do the residents of Lytton react to her language?

13. What does Nana mean when she says to Peyton, "you've never been in charge of your own life. They haven't let you"? Who are "they"? Does Peyton ever take charge of her own life? If so, when?

14. Nana predicts that Peyton posses a "power." What do you think that power is? Does Peyton ever begin to exercise her power? What are the obstacles that lie in her path?

15. Peyton interprets the film, "*On the Beach*" to mean, "that everybody always loses everybody they love, but they need to do it, anyway, because . . . there isn't anything else." Does her analysis apply to her own life? To Frazier and Nora's life? How so? What is the price these three characters pay for loving?

16. When Peyton learns the truth about her mother's life and death, what impact does it have on her? Was Nora right to tell her?

17. How does Peyton find her voice as a writer? What are the steps that lead her to the completion of her graduation speech? What insights do we learn about Siddons through watching her character discover the joys of writing? The delivery of her speech is a disaster. Do you think her failure will deter her from writing in the future? Why, or why not?

Author Bio

THE GIRLS OF AUGUST is Anne Rivers Siddons's 19th novel. Her previous bestselling novels include BURNT MOUNTAIN, OFF SEASON, SWEETWATER CREEK, ISLANDS, NORA NORA, LOW COUNTRY, UP ISLAND, FAULT LINES, DOWNTOWN, HILL TOWNS, COLONY, OUTER BANKS, KING'S OAK, PEACHTREE ROAD, HOMEPLACE, FOX'S EARTH, THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR and HEARTBREAK HOTEL. She is also the author of a work of nonfiction, JOHN CHANCELLOR MAKES ME CRY. She and her husband, Heyward, split their time between their home in Charleston, SC and Brooklin, ME.

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