ReadingGroupGuides
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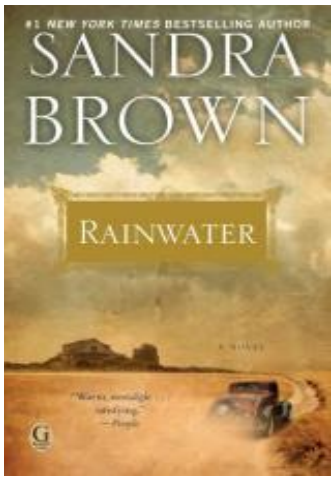
Rainwater

by Sandra Brown



About the Book

The year is 1934. With the country in the stranglehold of drought and economic depression, Ella Barron runs her Texas boardinghouse with an efficiency that ensures her life will be kept in balance. Between chores of cooking and cleaning for her residents, she cares for her ten-year-old son, Solly, a sweet but challenging child whose misunderstood behavior finds Ella on the receiving end of pity, derision and suspicion.

When David Rainwater arrives at the house looking for lodging, he comes recommended by a trusted friend as "a man of impeccable character." But Ella senses that admitting Mr. Rainwater will bring about unsettling changes.

However, times are hard, and in order to make ends meet, Ella's house must remain one hundred percent occupied. So Mr. Rainwater moves into her house... and impacts her life in ways Ella could never have foreseen.

The changes are echoed by the turbulence beyond the house walls. Friends and neighbors who've thus far maintained a tenuous grip on their meager livelihoods now face foreclosure and financial ruin. In an effort to save their families from homelessness and hunger, farmers and cattlemen are forced to make choices that come with heartrending consequences.

The climate of desperation creates a fertile atmosphere for racial tensions and social unrest. Conrad Ellis --- privileged and spoiled and Ella's nemesis since childhood --- steps into this arena of teeming hostility to exact his vengeance and demonstrate the extent of his blind hatred and unlimited cruelty. He and his gang of hoodlums come to embody the rule of law, and no one in Gilead, Texas, is safe. Particularly Ella and Solly.

In this hotbed of uncertainty, Ella finds Mr. Rainwater a calming presence. She is moved by the kindness he shows other boarders, Solly... and Ella herself. Slowly, she begins to rely on his soft-spokenness, his restraint and the steely resolve of his convictions.

And on the hottest, most violent night of the summer, those principles will be put to the ultimate test.

From acclaimed bestselling author Sandra Brown comes a powerfully moving novel celebrating the largess and foresight of a great bygone generation. It tells a story that bears witness to a bittersweet truth: that love is worth whatever price one must pay for it.

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Discussion Guide

1. What qualities does Ella Brown possess? What is her greatest strength? What is her greatest weakness? Which qualities are inherent and which do you attribute to her situation in life?

2. Rainwater is set in Depression-era Texas. What details does Brown use to create atmosphere? How does the setting affect the action of the story?

3. It?s clear from the beginning that Ella wants to prevent Solly?s odd behavior from being misunderstood and ridiculed, and to avoid a situation which would result in his being taken away from her and institutionalized. Why does Ella reject the advice of Dr. Kincaid and Mr. Rainwater? Is maternal love impeding her from making a decision.

4. Mr. Rainwater is an outsider, which automatically makes him an object of speculation and curiosity. Why does he want to keep his illness and his affluence a secret? What clues to both did you find? Did you have any unanswered questions about him?

5. The small-town grapevine plays a dramatic role in the story. Discuss the ways in which it was beneficial, and ways in which the effects of gossip were damaging. Would the story have unfolded differently had it been set in a larger city? How so?

6. The financial strain of the era influences the actions of the characters. How does Brown portray the dire straits of the poor? Did the kindness and charity of Ella, Margaret, and others surprise you?

7. The showdown between Conrad Ellis?s gang and the hungry mob is a pivotal scene. The actions and dialog of each character reveal much about that character. What is each party trying to protect or gain? Who is right and who is wrong?

8. Discuss how the relationship between Ella and Rainwater evolves from that of landlady and boarder into a loving one. How would you describe their relationship? Both of these characters are coping with a personal calamity --- how does that influence their behavior toward each other? Would they have fallen in love had their circumstances not been as bleak?

9. What different kinds of prejudices did you find in the story and how were they expressed? Are there commonalities between the oppressed groups?

10. Describe the black community?s affection for Brother Calvin. What does he represent to them? Why is he so highly admired by people of both races?

11. Is Brother Calvin a hero? Is he a martyr? Are the qualities of a Depression-era hero different from a modern hero?

12. At the end of the novel, why does Mr. Rainwater take responsibility for Solly?s actions? Was he protecting Solly or punishing himself? Did his health or love for Ella factor into the decision? Is he a hero?

13. The novel is framed as a flashback. Did this add to the suspense?

14. Except for the prologue and epilogue, every scene is told from Ella?s point of view. Did you realize this as you were reading it? Did Brown do this intentionally? Why?

15. Do you see any parallels between the financial hardships then and those facing our nation now? How are they similar and how do they differ? In general, do people respond to differently now to setbacks than people who lived through the Great Depression did?

Enhance Your Book Club

1. Explore the work of John Steinbeck --- a novelist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his portrayal of the Dust Bowl, **The Grapes of Wrath**. Visit the website of the National Steinbeck Center: http://www.Steinbeck.org.

2. In **Rainwater**, Sandra Brown describes the delicious Southern meals cooked by Ella Barron. Create your own inspired feast by searching ?Southern Recipes? on http://www.foodnetwork.com. Try ?Hattie?s Fried Chicken? with ?Traditional Biscuits?.

3. Learn more about Sandra Brown on her website:http://www.sandrabrown.net/.

Author Bio

Sandra Brown is the author of over 75 *New York Times* bestsellers, including BLOODLUST, BLOOD MOON, OUT OF NOWHERE, OVERKILL, BLIND TIGER, THICK AS THIEVES, SEEING RED, OUTFOX, TAILSPIN, SEEING RED, STING and MEAN STREAK.

Writing professionally since 1981, Brown has published over 80 novels and has upwards of 80 million copies of her books in print worldwide. Her work has been translated into 34 languages.

Brown holds an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Texas Christian University, where she and her husband Michael Brown, have instituted the ELF, a scholarship awarded annually. She has served as president of Mystery Writers of America, and in 2008 she was named Thriller Master, the top award given by the International Thriller

Writer?s Association. Other honors include the Texas Medal of Arts Award for Literature and the Romance Writers of America?s Lifetime Achievement Award.

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