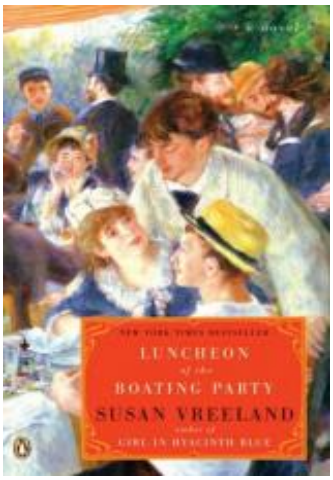
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Luncheon of the Boating Party

by Susan Vreeland



About the Book

Bestselling author Susan Vreeland returns with a vivid exploration of one of the most beloved Renoir paintings in the world.

Instantly recognizable, Auguste Renoir?s masterpiece depicts a gathering of his real friends enjoying a summer Sunday on a cafe terrace along the Seine near Paris. A wealthy painter, an art collector, an Italian journalist, a war hero, a celebrated actress, and Renoir?s future wife, among others, share this moment of *la vie moderne*, a time when social constraints were loosening and Paris was healing after the Franco-Prussian War. Parisians were bursting with a desire for pleasure and a yearning to create something extraordinary out of life. Renoir shared these urges and took on this most challenging project at a time of personal crises in art and love, all the while facing issues of loyalty and the diverging styles that were tearing apart the Impressionist group. Narrated by Renoir and seven of the models and using settings in Paris and on the Seine, Vreeland illuminates the gusto, hedonism, and art of the era. With a gorgeous palette of vibrant, captivating characters, she paints their lives, loves, losses, and triumphs in a brilliant portrait of her own.

Discussion Guide

1. How do you think Renoir?s humble beginnings affected his life and his painting?

2. Describe what you think was going through Renoir?s mind as he took on the technical challenge of this painting. Was he ready for this? How was he to achieve the perspective? Position the figures? Anchor the terrace? Convey the river below?

3. Besides Renoir, how do other characters explore the issue of creative expression? In whom is this yearning most deeply felt? What effect does the gathering of these people have on each other? While reading this book, could you imagine being a model in the painting? What would it have been like for you? Elaborate on how you would have fit in or

not.

4. Discuss the level of commitment each character had to the painting. How did their involvement affect the painting? Do you relate to any one of the characters in the painting **Luncheon of the Boating Party**?

5. How do the separate models? plots act upon the progress of the painting and enlighten a single common theme? Which of the male models is your favorite? And of the female models? Why does each hold a place in your affections?

6. How did the fact that there was time pressure to finish the painting affect its result? Would the painting have turned out differently if Renoir had had more time to work on it?

7. Renoir seems to fall in love over and over again with the two things he most adored: the female form and the riverscape. He saw one woman as color, another as line. Was there something about the season in which he was painting and his relationships with Aline and Alphonsine that contributed to the overall effect of the image?

8. Why did Renoir hate the term ?Impressionist? so much?

9. What does **Luncheon of the Boating Party** suggest about finding oneself in life and in love? Is there something unique about the way an artist finds his or her way?

10. In what ways, if any, did the novel surprise you? How do you react to a novel that incorporates real and well-known people as characters? Did anything in the novel affect the way you had previously thought about Renoir? Impressionism? French culture?

11. What in the story of this painting gives you a fresh perspective on understanding and developing the relationships and creative inclinations in your own life?

Author Bio

Susan Vreeland is the internationally known author of art-related historical fiction. Four of her books are *New York Times* bestsellers.

LISETTE'S LIST presents one woman's yearning for art at a time when her family's collection of paintings had to be hidden in the south of France from Nazi art thieves. CLARA AND MR. TIFFANY reveals the talented woman who conceived of and designed the well-loved Tiffany leaded glass lamps. LUNCHEON OF THE BOATING PARTY depicts Renoir's masterpiece, the personalities involved in its making, and the *joie de vivre* of late 19th-century Paris. LIFE STUDIES is a collection of stories of Impressionist painters told by people who knew them, as well as contemporary individuals encountering art in meaningful ways. GIRL IN HYACINTH BLUE traces an alleged Vermeer painting through the centuries. THE PASSION OF ARTEMISIA illuminates Italian Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. THE FOREST LOVER follows rebel British Columbia painter Emily Carr in her encounters with native peoples and cultures. WHAT LOVE SEES tells the love story of a blind couple who refuse to accept limitations.

Four of these books have been winners of the Theodor Geisel Award, the highest honor given by the San Diego Book Awards. Vreeland's novels have been translated into 26 languages, and have frequently been selected as Book Sense Picks. She was a high school English teacher in San Diego for 30 years.

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