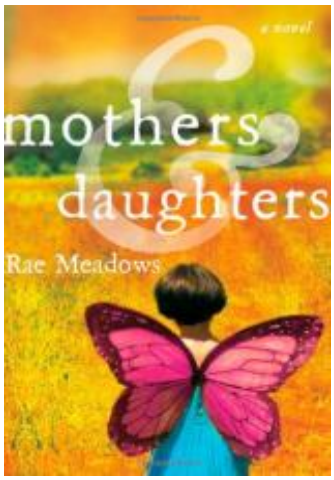
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Mothers and Daughters

by Rae Meadows



About the Book

A rich and luminous novel about three generations of women in one family: the love they share, the dreams they refuse to surrender, and the secrets they hold.

Samantha is lost in the joys of new motherhood --- the softness of her 8-month-old daughter's skin, the lovely weight of her child in her arms --- but in trading her artistic dreams to care for her child, Sam worries she's lost something of herself. And she is still mourning another loss: her mother, Iris, died just one year ago.

When a box of Iris's belongings arrives on Sam's doorstep, she discovers links to pieces of her family history but is puzzled by much of the information the box contains. She learns that her grandmother Violet left New York City as an eleven-year-old girl, traveling by herself to the Midwest in search of a better life. But what was Violet's real reason for leaving? And how could she have made that trip alone at such a tender age?

In confronting secrets from her family's past, Sam comes to terms with deep secrets from her own. Moving back and forth in time between the stories of Sam, Violet, and Iris, **Mothers and Daughters** is the spellbinding tale of three remarkable women connected across a century by the complex wonder of motherhood.

Discussion Guide

1. The novel weaves together three storylines, moving in and out through time and perspective. How does this stylistic device contribute to the storytelling? Does it help you better understand the differences and similarities among the three women?

2. We are introduced to Violet as a rambunctious young girl living in the early 1900?s. She has an adventurous zeal for life --- that is, until she is sent off on the Orphan Train. In what ways has Vio¬let changed from a little girl to the older

woman Iris remembers as her mother? Why do you think she has changed? How has she remained the same?

3. Iris tells Sam that women don?t know what they will be like as mothers. Why do you think she tells her this? Do you think this is true? Do women really have no control over the mothers they be¬come?

4. There are a lot of secrets that are kept by the women in the novel (ie. Violet?s abandonment by her mother; Iris?s trip to the Drake Hotel; Sam?s abortion). Why do you think they keep these secrets --- even from those closest to them?

5. There is a running theme of identity and self throughout the novel. Iris feels that she put up a façade as a mother. Samantha loses her will to create art after having Ella. Is losing one?s identity part of becoming a mother? Do the women in this novel think that motherhood is worth the sacri¬fice?

6. Iris wonders if having children is a way to try and understand one?s own mother. Is this is true? In what ways have the mothers? experiences with their own children in this novel revealed insight into the way they view their own mothers?

7. Violet chooses her path and suggests being sent on the Orphan Train. ?She wanted what her mother could never give her.? Do you think she made the right decision? How would her life have been different?

8. Why does Sam go back to the Sunrise Inn to look for the young girl? Is it her own sense of wanting to be needed that drives her back? Does she see something in herself in the girl?

9. Iris sees motherhood as a duty to fulfill, rather than a natural instinct. How has she demonstrated this in her own role as a mother? How is Sam different than her as a mother?

10. Mothers influence their children by passing down traditions and values. What have the mothers in this novel (Lilibeth, Violet, Iris, Sam) passed on to their daughters? Their granddaughters?

11. Iris has a deeper connection with Sam as an adult than she does with Sam as a child. Does there come a time when the divide between mother and daughter lessens as they become women --- or does the mother-child relationship always remain?

12. Despite the apparent emptiness in Violet and Iris?s lives, Sam is ultimately able to live out the expectations they had for themselves --- a deep and intimate connection to her child, a passion for creating, and a meaningful marriage. Do you think Violet and Iris would agree that their circum¬stances were worthwhile in the end?

Author Bio

Rae Meadows is the author of five novels, including I WILL SEND RAIN. She is the recipient of the Goldenberg Prize for Fiction, the Hackney Literary Award for the novel, and the Utah Book Award, and her work has been published widely. She grew up admiring the Soviet gymnasts of the 1970s, and in her forties decided to go back to the thing she loved as a child. She now trains regularly in gymnastics. She lives with her family in Brooklyn.

Critical Praise

Rae Meadows has written a richly textured novel of three generations of mothers and daughters who by finding each other, find themselves. In these beautifully interwoven stories of birth and death, love and loss, Violet, Iris, and Samantha explore the genetic threads that connect each to the others. MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS is a powerful novel of women's secrets and strength.

Mothers and Daughters

by Rae Meadows

Publication Date: March 29, 2011
Genres: Fiction
Hardcover: 272 pages
Publisher: Henry Holt and Co.
ISBN-10: 0805093834
ISBN-13: 9780805093834