The Exiles

by Christina Baker Kline



About the Book

The author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller ORPHAN TRAIN returns with an ambitious, emotionally resonant novel about three women whose lives are bound together in 19th-century Australia and the hardships they weather together as they fight for redemption and freedom in a new society.

Seduced by her employer?s son, Evangeline, a naïve young governess in early 19th-century London, is discharged when her pregnancy is discovered and sent to the notorious Newgate Prison. After months in the fetid, overcrowded jail, she learns she is sentenced to ?the land beyond the seas,? Van Diemen?s Land, a penal colony in Australia. Though uncertain of what awaits, Evangeline knows one thing: the child she carries will be born on the months-long voyage to this distant land.

During the journey on a repurposed slave ship, the *Medea*, Evangeline strikes up a friendship with Hazel, a girl little older than her former pupils who was sentenced to seven years transport for stealing a silver spoon. Canny where Evangeline is guileless, Hazel --- a skilled midwife and herbalist --- is soon offering home remedies to both prisoners and sailors in return for a variety of favors.

Though Australia has been home to Aboriginal people for more than 50,000 years, the British government in the 1840s considers its fledgling colony uninhabited and unsettled, and views the natives as an unpleasant nuisance. By the time the *Medea* arrives, many of them have been forcibly relocated, their land seized by white colonists. One of these relocated people is Mathinna, the orphaned daughter of the Chief of the Lowreenne tribe, who has been adopted by the new governor of Van Diemen?s Land.

In this gorgeous novel, Christina Baker Kline brilliantly recreates the beginnings of a new society in a beautiful and challenging land, telling the story of Australia from a fresh perspective, through the experiences of Evangeline, Hazel and Mathinna. While life in Australia is punishing and often brutally unfair, it is also, for some, an opportunity: for

redemption, for a new way of life, for unimagined freedom. Told in exquisite detail and incisive prose, THE EXILES is a story of grace born from hardship, the unbreakable bonds of female friendships, and the unfettering of legacy.

Discussion Guide

1. Were you familiar with this part of Australia?s history before reading? Was there anything new you learned that particularly surprised you?

2. Mathinna and Evangeline are both orphans, and Hazel has a difficult relationship with her mother. What impact does this have on their characters, and how do you think their stories would have been different if their families were still alive?

3. Compare the different treatments of male and female convicts aboard the *Medea*. Though the male convicts are also being punished, they are still in a position of authority over the female prisoners. What does this say about British society in the 1800s?

4. The Franklins make Mathinna feel like she doesn?t belong in Hobart Town, yet Mrs. Wilson tells Mathinna that they are the ones who don?t belong. What does it mean to belong to a place? Who decides who does and does not belong?

5. Were you surprised by Evangeline?s fate? Why or why not?

6. What is the significance of Mathinna losing her language? Of all the ways she changes after leaving Flinders, why does this loss feel the most important to her, and mark such a clear divide from her old life?

7. Throughout the book, multiple characters reference and find comfort in Shakespeare?s THE TEMPEST. If you?ve read THE TEMPEST, why do you think the author chose this play in particular? What connections and common themes does it share with THE EXILES?

8. At one point, Mathinna thinks to herself, ?She was tired of feeling as if she lived between worlds. This was the world she lived in now.? In what way does Van Diemen?s Land act as a ?between world? for the different characters? How do they each struggle with leaving behind their old lives and adapting to new ones?

9. Do you think Hazel really could have forgiven Buck if he had let her? Would you have been able to forgive him after everything he did?

10. Ruby thinks about her ?many mothers,? and how each played a key role in taking care of her and making her the person she became. What role do found families, and found mothers in particular, play throughout the story?

11. Dr. Garrett reflects on the privileges granted the residents of Van Diemen?s Land, saying, ?It is my sense that, despite its hardships and limitations, living in a new world accords one certain freedoms. Social hierarchies are not as rigidly enforced.? In what ways is this both true and not true for each of the characters in THE EXILES? What are the limitations of these freedoms --- which characters are allowed them, and why are others excluded?

12. What connections do you see between the historical world of THE EXILES and today?

Author Bio

A #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of 10 novels, including ORPHAN TRAIN, THE EXILES, PLEASE DON'T LIE (co-authored with Anne Burt) and THE FOURSOME, Christina Baker Kline is published in more than 40 countries. Her novels have received the New England Prize for Fiction, the Maine Literary Award, and a Barnes & Noble Discover Award, among other prizes, and have been chosen by hundreds of communities, universities and schools as ?One Book, One Read? selections. Her essays, articles and reviews have appeared in publications such as *The New York Times* and *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

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