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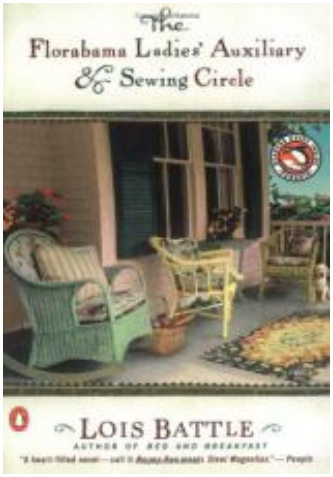
The Florabama Ladies' Auxiliary & Sewing Circle

by Lois Battle



About the Book

Welcome to Florabama, Alabama --- a place where you can stop to sip a co'cola or iced tea and think about money and love. If you had'em, you were free to think about other things. If you didn't you couldn't think about anything else.

"We've been screwed blue and tattooed," quips Hilly Pruitt, upon hearing the news of the closing of Cherished Lady, the local lingerie factory where she's worked a lifetime. The same day the plant closes, Bonnie Duke Cullman, former-deb turned Atlanta-society-wife, has herself been downsized --- right out of her marriage and picture-perfect life. In an unlikely alliance, Bonnie, Hilly, and the rest of the ex-bra seamstresses join forces in the "Displaced Homemakers Program" at a podunk community college. Together they endure a midlife survival course where the events of a single year forever alter the way they see the world and their places in it.

Discussion Guide

1. How do Battle's characters and their stories reflect current issues and trends in the South, and in America in general?

2. Compare Bonnie and Ruth. Even though they come from such diverse backgrounds, how are their situations similar?

3. Compare the leading men in Bonnie's life: the Duke, Riz, and Devoe. What are their strengths and weaknesses? How does each represent the typical "Southern" gentleman? How, if at all, does each represent the typical "modern" man?

4. What role does money play in this novel? Is it always a good thing to have? What are the ramifications of having too much? What are the benefits of not always having enough?

5. In the beginning of the novel, Bonnie looks back on her marriage to Devoe, before his bankruptcy and their divorce, and observes that she had lead a "charmed life." Do you think a year later she would make that same observation?

6. On page 7, Mrs. Patel, the hotel owner, says, "Sometimes when we are in difficulty, old habits of the mind are the worst obstacles." What does she mean by "old habits of the mind?" How does this piece of wisdom apply to Bonnie? To the women she advises?

7. The first night in her new house, Bonnie writes in a journal that she feels "stripped." She is reminded of what she felt as an adolescent, "as though her adult life had been no more than an interim, and now she'd come back to her reflective, questioning, self-conscious nature, worried about who she was, her place in the world, what the future would hold." These are scary feelings for a normally self-confident woman. Have you ever had these feelings? What kinds of incidents prompted them?

8. What elements of the novel --- characters, events, setting --- are uniquely Southern? Could this story have taken place anywhere else in the country?

9. How has Battle's depiction of the modern South changed your own perceptions about that part of the country?

10. What do you think of Bonnie's relationship with Riz? Besides a new mattress, what does he offer her? Is he better for her than Devoe? What will become of their relationship?

11. Many of the characters in this novel have faced enormous losses and overwhelming adversity --- and ended up better off than they were before. Can you think of situations where disasters turned into triumphs? How can we apply the lessons these characters learned to our own daily lives?

Author Bio

Lois Battle's seven novels include **Bed and Breakfast**, **Storyville**, **War Brides**, and **A Habit of the Blood** (all Penguin). She lives in Beaufort, South Carolina.

Critical Praise

"An intelligent, poignant, funny, wistful novel of expectations, love and rebirth."

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