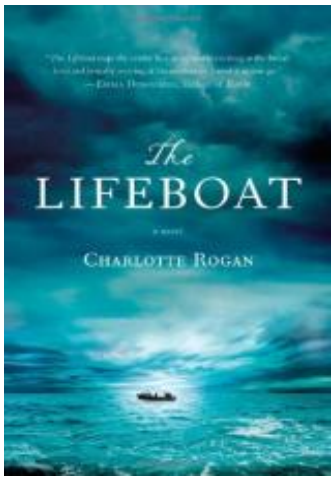
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Lifeboat

by Charlotte Rogan



About the Book

Grace Winter, 22, is both a newlywed and a widow. She is also on trial for her life.

In the summer of 1914, the elegant ocean liner carrying her and her husband Henry across the Atlantic suffers a mysterious explosion. Setting aside his own safety, Henry secures Grace a place in a lifeboat, which the survivors quickly realize is over capacity. For any to live, some must die.

As the castaways battle the elements, and each other, Grace recollects the unorthodox way she and Henry met, and the new life of privilege she thought she'd found. Will she pay any price to keep it?

THE LIFEBOAT is a page-turning novel of hard choices and survival, narrated by a woman as unforgettable and complex as the events she describes.

Discussion Guide

1. In disaster situations, is it right to save women and children first? What moral justifications exist for your answer?
2. Discuss the thought experiment referred to in Grace?s trial, also known as ?The Plank of Carneades.? Is either the first or second swimmer to reach the plank justified in pushing the other swimmer away?
3. What do you think of the concept of necessity as a justification for behavior that would not be condoned in ordinary circumstances?
4. If you were to ask Grace what qualities she looks for in a friend, what would she say? What would the truth be?
5. Which characters, in your opinion, hold the moral high ground?
6. Seventeenth-century political philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke postulated that humankind started off in a state of nature and gradually gave up certain freedoms in return for security, an exchange sometimes called the social contract. How does the lifeboat approximate a state of nature? Does survival in such a state require

giving up personal freedom and autonomy?

7. Some modern writers assert that the advances in opportunities for women have been predicated on the requirement that women become more like men. Do you agree with this?
8. Are people more likely to revert to traditional male/female roles in crisis situations? What traditional male/female traits might help a person survive?
9. Author Warren Farrell, who writes about gender issues, has said: ?Men?s weakness is their façade of strength; women?s strength is their façade of weakness.? Does this hold true for the characters in THE LIFEBOAT?
10. In his book *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, Nathaniel Philbrick argues that an ?authoritarian? leadership style is useful in the early stages of a disaster, but a ?social? style becomes more important over time. Does this dynamic fully explain the power struggle in Lifeboat 14 or were other forces at work?
11. Does power always involve the threat of coercion? Besides violence, what forms of power influence the characters in THE LIFEBOAT?
12. The first thing a person says is often more honest than later explanations. Are there instances in the book where a character?s early words are a clue to assessing the truth of a particular situation or incident?
13. Do you think Mr. Hardie stole or helped to steal anything from the sinking *Empress Alexandra*? Would this have been wrong, given that any valuables were destined to be lost forever?
14. Should Grace have been acquitted of Mr. Hardie?s murder?
15. Comment on the use of storytelling in the novel. Does your answer shed any light on Grace?s own story?

Author Bio

Charlotte Rogan graduated from Princeton University in 1975. She worked at various jobs, mostly in the fields of architecture and engineering, before teaching herself to write and staying home to bring up triplets. An old criminal law text and her childhood experiences among a family of sailors provided inspiration for THE LIFEBOAT, her first novel. After many years in Dallas and a year in Johannesburg, she and her husband now live in Westport, Connecticut.

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