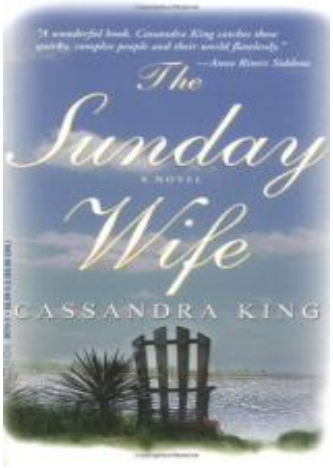
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Sunday Wife

by Cassandra King Conroy



About the Book

In the tradition of Patricia Gaffney's **Saving Graces** -- a captivating novel about one woman's journey toward independence and the life-changing friendship that guides her there.

Married for 20 years to the Reverend Benjamin Lynch, a handsome, ambitious minister of the prestigious Methodist church, Dean Lynch has never quite adjusted her temperament to the demands of the role of a Sunday wife. When her husband is assigned to a larger and more demanding community in the Florida panhandle, Dean becomes fast friends with Augusta Holderfield, a woman whose good looks and extravagant habits immediately entrance her. As their friendship evolves, Augusta challenges Dean to break free from her traditional role as the preacher's wife. Just as Dean is questioning everything she has always valued, a tragedy occurs, providing the catalyst for change in ways she never could have imagined.

Discussion Guide

1. What is a Sunday wife? What makes a "good" one? Consider whether or not Dean fits the bill, and explain your reasoning.

2. How does the prologue introduce you to the book's themes?

3. Who is the narrator and is this narrator reliable? Explore what the book would have been like if Ben had been the narrator. Consider how the story would unfold if one of the other characters were narrating.

4. What is the role of religion in **The Sunday Wife**? How does it frame -? or anchor -? the story? Share who you believe holds the book's moral center, and why?

5. Discuss the different social issues and dilemmas that King weaves throughout -? like same-sex marriage, psychic healing, book banning and adultery -? and examine why she uses them to tell this story.

6. Were you surprised at Dean's early admission that she and Ben don't share a bedroom? What kind of relationship does this lead you to believe that they have? Looking at Ben and Dean's exchange on pages 112-113, what kind of person is Dean with her husband?

7. When Dean succeeds in cultivating a friendship with Augusta and Maddox, why isn't Ben ecstatic? Explore whether or not Augusta causes a rift between Ben and Dean. Is Dean and Ben's relationship already coming apart? Why does Augusta tell Dean, "You're not the woman you appear to be"? (page 116)

8. How are Dean and Augusta alike? What are your impressions of them? Thinking about Ben and Maddox, discuss their similarities and differences and what kind of men you think they are, and why.

9. Look at the name choices and the character traits the names imply. How do names influence the reader's perception of the characters?

10. On page 61, Dean and Augusta talk about fate vs. determination and choice. Share whether or not you believe, as Augusta does, that there are unseen forces that determine our fate. Why? How do Augusta's beliefs fit with what happens in her life?

11. Explore the turmoil Rich and Godwin's union causes the community. Why is Ben so upset about Rich and Godwin's union? Why was he so unsympathetic about Dean being attacked? What would you say to him if you were Dean?

12. Why does Augusta's affair with John Marcus Vickery upset Dean so much? Why does Dean say to Augusta, "You've got a child now. Do you want someone taking advantage of Gus like that?" Is this a valid argument? On page 249, Augusta says she has a "trump card." What did you think she was talking about when she said this? What does the trump card turn out to be?

13. Discuss the conversation between Dean and Vickery that begins on page 237. Do you think Vickery is being honest -? or flirtatious? Why are so many people drawn to Vickery, and to Ben? On page 239, Vickery says to Dean, "Ben is going to lose you." Why would he presume to say so? Do you think Dean had any notion of leaving Ben at this point?

14. What, if any, is the symbolism of Augusta going over the Crystal River Bridge? (page 260) How do you react to Dean's not even thinking of Ben during the morning after Augusta dies? Do you feel sorry for Vickery not having anyone to grieve with? Did he really love Augusta?

15. Would you have given Augusta's note to her husband or hidden from him it like Dean did? Discuss why Dean does this and whether or not she was protecting Maddox. What are the consequences of Dean's actions? Why does Maddox get so angry when he finally reads the letter?

Author Bio

Cassandra King is an award-winning and bestselling novelist whose fiction has won the hearts of readers everywhere,

especially in the American south. Often told in first person, her novels portray strong and memorable characters who struggle with the same timely issues and dilemmas that readers face in their own lives. Before becoming an author, she has taught creative writing on the college level, conducted corporate writing seminars, and worked as a human interest reporter. The widow of acclaimed author Pat Conroy, Cassandra resides in Beaufort, South Carolina, where she is honorary chair of the Pat Conroy Literary Center.

Critical Praise

"Rich, dense and satisfying."

The Sunday Wife

by Cassandra King Conroy

Publication Date: January 1, 2005
Genres: Fiction, Literary Fiction
Mass Market Paperback: 560 pages
Publisher: Hyperion
ISBN-10: 0786890703
ISBN-13: 9780786890705