

Books in a Box

Reading Guide

Blaine
Bookmobile
Deming
Everson
Ferndale
Island
Lynden
Maple Falls
Point Roberts
Sumas
wcls.org

the best place to begin



whatcom county
library system

Books in a Box Information

We hope you will enjoy the convenience of having multiple copies of the same title to share—either with your official book group or with an unofficial friends-and-family group!

Some general information about the kits:

- ◆ Kits check out for six weeks.
- ◆ Kits are available to reserve, but we cannot guarantee their availability for specific dates.
- ◆ One person in the group is responsible for the kits full return.
- ◆ Return kits in person at any Whatcom County library

How do I find a list of all your kits?

- ◆ Go to www.wcls.org
- ◆ Click on “catalog”
- ◆ In the Keyword Search type “book club kit”

This list includes kits owned by both Whatcom County and Bellingham Library Systems. Please note that the Bellingham kits must be picked up and returned to the Bellingham Library. Whatcom County kits can be reserved and sent to any location for pickup.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. "Sad words are just another beauty. A sad story means, this storyteller is alive" (p. 9). For Little Bee and other asylum seekers, the story of their life thus far is often all they have. What happens to the characters that carry their stories with them, both physically and mentally? What happens when we try to forget our past? How much control over their own stories do the characters in the book seem to have?

2. Little Bee tells the reader, "We must see all scars as beauty. Okay? This will be our secret. Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, I survived" (p. 9). Which characters in the story are left with physical scars? Emotional scars? Do they embrace them as beautiful? Do you have any scars you've come to embrace? Did you feel more connected to Little Bee as a narrator after this pact?

3. Little Bee strives to learn the Queen's English in order to survive in the detention center. How does her grasp of the language compare with Charlie's? How does the way each of these two characters handle the English language help to characterize them?

4. How did it affect your reading experience to have two narrators? Did you trust one woman more than the other? Did you prefer the voice of one above the other?

5. Little Bee credits a small bottle of nail polish for "saving her life" while she was in the detention center (p. 7). Is there any object or act that helps you feel alive and beautiful, even when everything else seems to be falling apart?

6. Of the English language Little Bee says, "Every word can defend itself. Just when you go to grab it, it can split into two separate meanings so the understanding closes on empty air" (p. 12).

What do you think she means by this? Can you think of any examples of English words that defend themselves? Why is language so important to Little Bee?

7. Little Bee says of horror films, "Horror in your country is something you take a dose of to remind yourself that you are not suffering from it" (p. 45). Do you agree? Was reading this novel in any way a dose of horror for you? How did it help you reflect on the presence or lack of horror in your own life?

8. Little Bee figures out the best way to kill herself in any given situation, just in case "the men come suddenly." How do these plans help Little Bee reclaim some power? Were you disturbed by this, or were you able to find the humor in some of the scenarios she imagines?

9. What does Udo changing her name to Little Bee symbolize for you? How does her new name offer her protection? Do you think the name suits her?

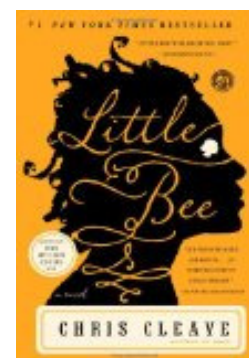
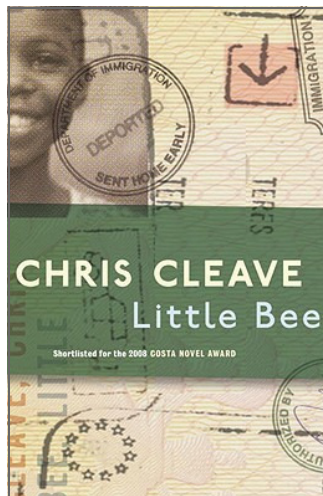
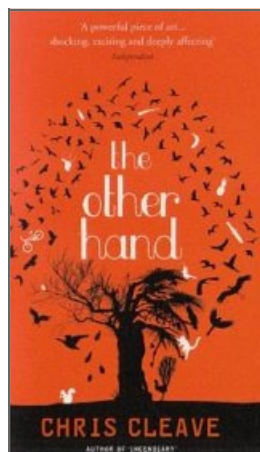
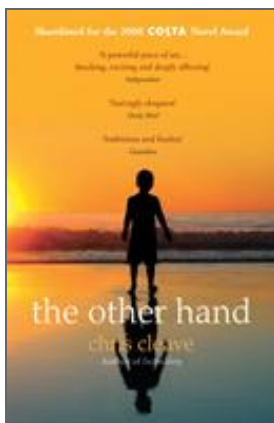
10. "To have an affair, I began to realize, was a relatively minor transgression. But to really escape from Andrew, to really become myself, I had to go the whole way and fall in love" (p. 161-162). Do you agree with Sarah that an affair is a minor transgression? How did falling in love with someone else help Sarah become herself? What role did Andrew play in perpetuating Sarah's extramarital affair?

11. When Little Bee finds that Andrew has hanged himself she thinks, "Of course I must save him, whatever it costs me, because he is a human being." And then she thinks, "Of course I must save myself, because I am a human being too" (p. 194). How do the characters in the story decide when to put themselves first and when to offer charity? Is one human life ever more valuable than another? What if one of the lives in question is your own?

12. Little Bee says, "I have noticed, in your country, I can say anything so long as I say that is the proverb in my country. Then people will nod their heads and look very serious" (p. 180). Take this opportunity to make up some proverbs to share with your book club. Are there any sayings from your culture that might be a good start?

13. Little Bee and her sister chose new names for themselves. Have your book club members rename one another. Choose names based on characteristics, like Little Bee's sister Kindness, or on things in nature, like Little Bee.

(Questions issued by publisher.)



Author Bio: Chris Cleave

Source: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides> and www.bookbrowse.com

- Birth—1973
- Where—London, England, UK
- Where—raised in both Buckinghamshire (UK) and Cameroon
- Education—Oxford University
- Awards—Somerset Maugham Award; Prix des Lecteurs
- Currently—lives in London



Chris Cleave is a columnist for the Guardian newspaper in London. His first novel, *Incendiary*, was published in twenty countries; won the 2006 Somerset Maugham Award; was shortlisted for the 2006 Commonwealth Writers' Prize; won the United States Book-of-the-Month Club's First Fiction Award; and won the Prix Special du Jury at the French Prix des Lecteurs 2007.

His second novel, *Little Bee*, was shortlisted for the prestigious Costa Award for Best Novel. Inspired by his childhood in West Africa and by an accidental visit to a British concentration camp, *Little Bee* is entitled *The Other Hand* in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Chris Cleave has been a barman, a long-distance sailor, a teacher of marine navigation, an internet pioneer and a journalist. He lives in London with his French wife and three mischievous Anglo-French children.

Reviews

Library Journal

★ *Little Bee*, Chris Cleave. Simon & Schuster, \$15.00 (271p) ISBN 978-1416589648

Book clubs in search of the next *Kite Runner* need look no further than this astonishing, flawless novel about what happens when ordinary, mundane Western lives are thrown into stark contrast against the terrifying realities of war-torn Africa. Their marriage in crisis, Andrew and Sarah O'Rourke impulsively accept a junket to a Nigerian beach resort as a last-ditch attempt to reconcile. When machete-wielding soldiers appear out of the jungle and force them to determine the fate of two African girls, everyone's lives are irrevocably shattered. Two years later in a London suburb, one of the girls, now a refugee, reconnects with Sarah. Together they face wrenching tests of a friendship forged under extreme duress. Best-selling author Cleave (*Incendiary*) effortlessly moves between alternating viewpoints with lucid, poignant prose and the occasional lighter note. A tension-filled dramatic ending and plenty of moral dilemmas add up to a satisfying, emotional read. Highly recommended for all libraries and book clubs.

Utterly enthralling page-turner..... Novelist Cleave does a brilliant job of making both characters not only believable but memorable.... These compelling voices grip the reader's heart and do not let go even after the book's hyper-tense final page. *Little Bee* is a harrowing and heartening marvel of a novel. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer*)

The voice that speaks from the first page of Chris Cleave's *Little Bee* is one you might never have heard—the voice of a smart, wary, heartsick immigrant scarred by the terrors of her past ... Read this urgent and wryly funny novel for its insights into simple humanity, the force that can disarm fear. (**O Magazine**)

Suggested Readalikes

The Thing Around Your Neck, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Incendiary, Chris Cleave.

The Book of Jonas, Stephen Dau.

Day After Night, Anita Diamant.

Room, Emma Donoghue.

Still Alice, Lisa Genova.

Crossing the Borders of Time, Leslie Maitland.

The Other Side of Truth, Beverley Naidoo.

State of Wonder, Ann Patchett.

A Thread of Grace, Mary Doria Russell.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, Rebecca Skloot.

The Help, Kathryn Stockett.

Brooklyn, Colm Tóibín.

Cutting for Stone, Abraham Verghese.

Web Resources

Interview (from author website): <http://www.chriscleave.com/books/little-bee/reading-group-guide/>

Find out more about asylum seekers in the U.S. : <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/our-work/refugee-protection/>

Information on Nigeria's refugees: <http://refugeemap.wikidot.com/nigeria>