

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Bel Canto by Ann Patchett

- The book begins with the “memory of a kiss.” And then the lights went out. How did this passage set the tone of the novel?
- This novel was written pre 9/11. Are these gentler, kinder terrorists? Is this a plausible rendering of the real event? How did the author achieve this?
- What was the role of music in this novel? And how did it affect various characters? The priest, Mr. Hosokawa, Caesar, Kato?
- Since the author makes it clear from early on what will happen to the terrorists, how did this affect your reading of it?
- In what ways was language a key component of this book? The characters spoke a wide variety of languages but seemed to understand each other. The translator became indispensable; language was a tool.
- Is there a hero in this book. If so, who?
- Two men declare their love for Roxanne, her accompanist and the Russian diplomat. Why do you think she reacted so differently to each declaration?
- Why did Ruben, the vice president, become such a slave to his fellow hostages?
- At one point Mr. Hosokawa seemed a little disappointed when viewing Roxanne for the first time. Is this a typical reaction when one views someone they have admired from afar? Have you ever been disenchanted in this way?
- Why did everyone seem to revere Roxanne so much?
- Can you remember any incidents of humor in the novel?
- As time progressed how did boundaries change?
- Was it a mistake on the terrorist's part to keep Roxanne Coss as a hostage?
- Had the president attended would things have evolved differently?
- In what ways was the chess game symbolic?
- Why didn't any of the hostages try to escape?
- How did the captors and hostages change during the four months of captivity?
- On p. 301-302 Messner tries to convince the generals to give up. Could they have? Why didn't they?
- When did the generals realize that all was lost? Or did they?
- Were you surprised at the ending? Did Gen really love Roxanne and vice versa?
- Other than Gen, who is the character you would most like to be incarcerated with?
- Why do groups still continue to kidnap and take hostages?



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