

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Girl With a Pearl Earring by Tracy Chevalier

- What role do colors play in this book?
- How would you describe Griet? (Catharina, Maria Thins, Tanneke, Vermeer, Cornelia)
- Do you think Griet was typical of other girls her age? In the time period of the novel and contemporary.
- What was your impression of the relationship between Vermeer and his wife? Did this impact Griet's relationship with Catharina?
- Griet is an outsider in the Vermeer household, what type of stress would that place on her? How did Maria Thins (Catharina, Tanneke, Cornelia, Vermeer) contribute to that stress?
- What do you think was the relationship between Maria Thins and Vermeer? Did Maria understand Vermeer's art more than his wife?
- Did Griet imagine Vermeer's interest in her?
- Griet's mother seemed to encourage the butcher's son in his courting of Griet. Why?
- What significance is there in Griet hiding her hair?
- Jealousy in relationships plays a large part in the novel. What are some examples?
- In 17th century Delft, parents determined what their child's future would be. What examples are there in the novel? Contrast with our culture.
- Did Griet make the right decision when she chose the butcher's son? What were her options? Contrast that with the options a woman of a similar age would now have.
- The primary relationship in the book appears to be Vermeer and Griet, but is it? What is the most difficult relationship? What is the most promising?
- The novel portrays the Protestant religion as grim compared to Catholicism. Do you think this is a true portrayal?
- The painting of Griet is timeless. How are the problems and joys Griet encountered also timeless?
- In 17th century Netherland the impact of the Catholic Church upon art was waning and the middle class was growing in influence. How is this reflected in the novel?
- Leeuwenhoek says of Vermeer, "He is an exceptional man, his eyes are worth a room full of gold. But sometimes he sees the world only as he wants it to be, not as it is. He does not understand the consequences for others of his point of view". Is this an accurate description of Vermeer?
- A theme in the novel is for characters to manipulate all they see into their version of reality or harmony. Vermeer's paintings are known for seeing the universal in the most ordinary setting. Griet's father cannot 'see' at all. What does seeing mean to the novel's other characters? Who sees the most clearly in the end?



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