

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

HANNA'S DAUGHTERS

by Marianne Fredriksson

- Regarding the notion of psychological inheritance, the author states in the foreword that "we inherit patterns, behavior, and ways of reacting to a much greater extent than we like to admit. It has not been easy to take this on; so much was forgotten, disappearing into the subconscious when grandparents left farms and countryside where the family had lived for generations." In your opinion, and drawing from your own experiences, what is the "forgotten" that the author speaks about?
- What are some psychological patterns and behaviors that women of your generation have "inherited"? Are they at odds with your ambitions and desires? Why or why not?
- Which of the main female and male characters did you most easily identify with? Why?
- Have you ever traced your family history before, or had a friend or relative who has? Share the experience.
- John Broman describes Hanna as "heathen and witchlike." Do you think that her superstitious nature is just about her fears and insecurities, or does she, like her daughter and granddaughter, have a special sense of things? Is it possible that, because she wasn't educated, her intuitiveness just expresses itself in this way? In that vein, what kind of woman do you think Hanna would have become had she been a part of Johanna's or Anna's generation?
- Do you feel that any of the women achieved genuine fulfillment in their marriages? Why or why not?
- In Anna's cathartic letter to her mother, she writes that Hanna was the strongest of the three women, that she had "sense and continuity" and was a "realist," who "lived as she believed." Do you agree with Anna's assessment? In what respects was Hanna more of a realist than her daughters? If you were to write this kind of letter to your mother, what would you tell her?
- In the last line of this letter, Anna writes, "I've learned a great deal, though, and I'm damn well not going to do what you did, Mother, give up when the truth collapses into a thousand truths." What do you think Anna means by this? How has Johanna given up? What is the truth Anna speaks of?
- In Johanna's story, we learn that Hanna offered to help Johanna raise her daughter and assured her that she didn't need to marry Arne. Does this seem an uncharacteristically modern attitude for Hanna, especially for a woman who suffered firsthand the shame of having a child out of wedlock? Why do you think she so adamantly maintains that Johanna doesn't need a husband, despite her own experience?



Skokie Public Library

5215 Oakton Street
Skokie, Illinois 60077
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax
www.skokielibrary.info

Skokie Public Library Trustees: John Graham, President;
Diana Hunter, Vice President/President Emerita; Zelda Rich, Secretary;
Susan Greer; Eva Weiner; John M. Wozniak; Dayle Zelenka

Director: Carolyn A. Anthony

- Anna believes that she is much stronger than her mother and has not "been bowed into total dependence." Has Anna really achieved emotional independence? Why or why not?
- Consider this passage at the end of the novel when Anna meets Sofie--the photographer working with Rickard. Anna walked around the tables, and some time went by before they saw she had turned quite white and rigid. Here's someone who knows, she thought. Who always focuses on the details, on the little things that could say everything. "What's the matter, Anna?" She didn't reply, but turned to Sofie. "Have you always known?" she whispered. "I think so." "I've just learned to. For three weeks here on the shore, I've learned--about really seeing." "Good, Anna. You won't lose it. You know, once seen . . ." "I know." What does this exchange mean to you? Why did these two strangers have such an intense connection?
- Johanna mentions that the writer Selma Lagerlof had a huge impact on her and her girlfriends in the 1920s--that she dangerously shaped their expectations of love and happiness. Is there a particular book, movie, or figure that affected you--or your generation--in this way?
- Aside from the great influence of family, each of these women has been significantly shaped by the spirit of her time and generation. Which do you think shapes us more--our personal, family history or the generation to which we belong? Why?