

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Patty Jane's House of Curl by Lorna Landvik

- Although some might say that *Patty Jane's House of Curl* is light reading, there seem to be several themes the author is anxious to develop. Did you notice a thematic thread as you were reading the book? What themes did you find?
 - Family/Community
 - Love (p. 160, 276)
 - Death and survival (p. 5)
- On p. 62 it says that Avel was partial to thoughtful debate ... Harriet had explained to him that too much thought scared her ... she was happier doing than thinking. Can this be a happy marriage?
- Authors sometimes leave their characters one dimensional, but usually strive for well-rounded, characters that grow. Think of some of the novel's characters and decide which stayed flat and which grew to well-rounded characters. Give examples.
 - Flat character: Patty J (p. 14, 173)
 - Well-Rounded: Ione (p. 13,20,89)
 - Thor: immature
- Nora was a child during most of her role as a narrator. How were we able to see an evolution of her character since she was mostly an observer? On p. 240 she says "Until I can handle things, I'll pretend I can handle things." At this point she becomes a "doer".
- What was the impact of Harriet and Patty Jane's parents' alcoholism on their view of life? Did this change after Harriet's bout with the bottle and Thor's reappearance?
- Which character did you prefer? Patty Jane or Harriet and why?
- Did Harriet's battle with alcohol ring true?
- Why did the author choose a beauty shop as the main setting of the second part of the novel?
- Patty Jane feels that her customers come to the beauty shop to achieve a sense of self — is this true? Where else do people go to achieve this?
 - Book discussions
 - Volunteerism
 - A bar
- Her first choice of a lecture for the group verged on pornography. Clyde's speech (p. 153) How did they change? If Clyde had not made his speech, do you think Patty Jane's experiment with culture would have succeeded?
- The author set the story during a decade that notoriously stereotypes women. Can you give some examples of the women in the novel trying to raise their self-esteem? (p. 1, 137, 142, 148, 153)
- How were the male characters depicted in this novel?
- There are some instances of love at first sight. Is this symptomatic of the times or is it a timeless phenomenon?
 - Thor (p. 4)
 - Avel and Harriet (p. 25)



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- How did the author do as far as the time setting of the novel. Did she get it right? Can you give some examples Landvik used that set the time period? Prologue (p. 1, 2, 20, 33, 45, 54, 153) “Queen for a Day”.
- On p. 119 Ione says to Harriet that “There is inside of all of us, I think, the soul of an eight year old.” Are we all young at heart? How can we keep this feeling? Which characters kept this sense of youth?
- At the beginning of the book did Ione seem older to you? Or is that our perception when we are young?
- Was it just the time period...were 50ish women “older” then? Did they have exercise programs or resign themselves to “aging gracefully”?
- Clyde at first refuses to sleep with Patty Jane saying that everyone has one true love, one pilot light and that for Patty Thor is that light. Do you agree with that concept. If so, why did Clyde finally succumb?
- Was Reese too good to be true? How were the men in this novel alike or different?
 - Avel (p.24, 25, 27, 31) Reese
 - Thor (p.64) Clyde
- Should the author have given readers more hints concerning Thor’s disappearance?
 - Grocery store encounter (p. 87)
 - Crazy woman’s visit to the salon
 - Harriet’s encounter (p. 170)
- Was Temple Curry a sympathetic character?
- Patty Jane’s House of Curl is considered to be an example of modern “Women’s Fiction.” (including typical works by Elinor Lipman, Elizabeth Berg — prose of hearth and home, of relationships and conflicts – on one end of the spectrum which includes Women’s Literature authors such as Flannery O’Connor, Eudora Welty, Virginia Woolf). With the growth of Oprah’s book club we see increased interest in this type of fiction. What is the appeal?
- Is there a similar sub-genre that could be called “Men’s Fiction?”