

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## **A RELIABLE WIFE by Robert Goolrick**

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- What role does the setting in isolated, bleak Wisconsin in the frozen winter play in the novel? What role does the very different, opulent setting of St. Louis play?
- What characteristics do the characters in the book have that sets them apart or makes them like regular folks?
- The author suggested in an interview that the characters all have secret motivations. What is the secret that motivates each character, and how do their actions reflect the secret?
- Why did Truitt wish to keep Catherine from interacting with the townspeople?
- Catherine had experienced her mother's love as a child. As an adult did she know how to love? How would you define the feeling Catherine had for Ralph and Antonio?
- The encounter between Catherine and her sister, Alice, is one of the pivotal moments of the novel. How do you view these two women after reading the story of their origins? Why do the two sisters wind up on such different paths? Why does Catherine ultimately lose hope in Alice's redemption?
- Why does Ralph allow himself to be gradually poisoned, even after he's aware of what's happening to him? What does this decision say about his character?
- Why does Catherine become obsessed with nurturing and reviving the "secret garden" of Ralph's mansion? What insights does this preoccupation reveal about Catherine's character?
- Does Catherine live up in any way to the advertisement Ralph places in the newspaper? (COUNTRY BUSINESSMAN SEEKS RELIABLE WIFE COMPELLED BY PRACTICAL NOT ROMANTIC REASONS.)
- Did you have sympathy for any of the characters? Did this change over the course of the novel?
- How does the bird imagery that runs through the book relate to the idea of imprisonment and escape?
- The author suggests that the theme of this novel is redemption and goodness. Where in the story did you sense either of these? Do you think the author succeeded in writing about redemption?
- The novel ends abruptly with Ralph inviting Catherine into the house. Let's say you are the author and the publishing company asked you to end the novel with an epilogue paragraph. What would your ending be?



**Skokie Public Library**

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