

Southfield Public Library

1000 White Women by Jim Fergus

Discussion questions used at SPL July 2013

1. How would you describe this book. . . Was it a romance? A historical novel? Alternative history?
2. Do you feel as though the male author did a good job in creating a woman's voice?
3. Do you feel as though the author knew his history? Did you accept his facts? Do you think our government would ever put into action a plan like the one in this book? Would it have worked if it did?
4. Let's talk about May. . . how would you describe her? Did it make sense to you that her father would basically kidnap her children and incorporate them within the family? What was her relationship with Harry like? Do you think May was right in her suspicions that her father paid him off? Or was he murdered?
5. Did you see any growth/change in May throughout the book? Was she a likable character for you? Was she naïve?
6. Did you see stereotypes in this book? Was that a good thing or a bad thing? Why do you think the author chose to do that?
7. Which supporting character did you like the best? Why?
8. From your own knowledge, how common do you think it was to shut women up in jails or asylums just to get rid of them?
9. Did you learn enough about May's childhood or upbringing to see what made her go against her family and society?
10. Did her willingness to leave a comfortable life for love and to work in a chicken factory give you an idea of how she would adapt to the Native American way of life? Why do you think it was so easy for her and the others to adapt to such a different way of life?
11. Did you have a favorite character? Why?
12. What did you think of the romance between May and John Bourke? Was that believable?
13. Did May respect the Native American way of life? Did she ever?
14. Can you compare the lives of Native American women and "civilized" women? Can you say if one life was better than the other?
15. How did the men fare in this book? Were they strong characters? Were they believable?
16. Did the characters really think things through before they acted? Why do you think the author had them behave that way?
17. There was a good bit of discussion throughout the book as to what is moral and what isn't. . . May's "life of sin," the thought of white women marrying "savages," the right of the United States to take over Indian lands, the wars between different Native American people. . . Were any of our characters on a moral high ground?
18. What types of bigotry did the author show in this novel? How much do you think the world has changed since 1875?
19. The author covered how the natural world was changing. . . how hat feathers were collected, fewer buffalo, more cities – what do you think he was trying to say to the reader? Has our attitude changed from those times?

20. Did the author have a message in this book? What do you think it was?
21. Our last book (The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Society) was written in a similar format – did you like one better than the other? Did one develop characters better than the other?
22. Have you dug into your family background? What interesting things have you found?

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General discussion questions

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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Discussion questions taken from LitLovers

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/707-one-thousand-white-women-fergus?showall=1>

Discussion Questions

1. *One Thousand White Women* was written by a man, but in a woman's point of view. Did you find this convincing?
2. In 1875, rebellious or unorthodox women were sometimes considered "hysterical" or insane. Is this still true in some circumstances today?
3. Does May Dodd remind you of a modern-day woman?
4. What would be today's equivalent of traveling west to an unknown part of the country with a group of strangers?
5. Did you feel the Native Americans were accurately portrayed in the novel?
6. If the "Brides for Indians" program were actually put into effect in 1875, do you feel it would have been effective?
7. What circumstances would prompt you to undergo a journey like the one May Dodd took?
8. Do you consider *One Thousand White Women* a tragic story? If so, why? If not, why not?
9. Of the supporting female characters, who did you find the most likeable?
10. Were any of May Dodd's actions unsympathetic? Would you find it difficult to leave your children behind in order to escape a horrendous situation?

(Questions issued by publisher.)