

Southfield Public Library

The Inner Circle by Brad Meltzer - Everyone's Reading

Discussion questions used at SPL May 26 & 27, 2015

1. The National Archives are a setting for major action in the novel. Do they make a good setting for a thriller, or could Meltzer have done more with such a mysterious and historical locale?
2. Many of the characters in The Inner Circle have symbolic names or nicknames. How does this affect the way you felt about them? Meltzer considered the alternate name of Benjamin January for his main character; do you think that would have been a better fit than Beecher White?
3. How does Meltzer's chapter structuring affect the pace of the novel? Does it add suspense, or is it disruptive?
4. In The Inner Circle characters are rarely who they first appear to be. How did the revelation of secrets and hidden agendas affect you as you read? Did it keep you turning pages, or did it become tiresome after a time?
5. The Diamond talks about invisible ink technology. Were the simple techniques for creating invisible inks known to you? Have you ever written a letter with lemon juice and then heated the paper to reveal the message? Is this something you'd try as an experiment – for yourself or with kids?
6. The Inner Circle shares in the grand tradition of intellectual adventurers. On more than one occasion, Beecher is compared to Indiana Jones. Are the comparisons fair? Besides Indiana Jones, what other fictional characters have adventures like Beecher's – either in print or in film?
7. How does Meltzer's use of verb tense contribute to the story? From Beecher's point of view the story is delivered mostly in present tense, but from the perspectives of other characters the story is largely in past tense. Why does Meltzer do this?
8. Is Beecher an unlikely hero? Is he a likeable hero? He's supposed to be a smart man, does he behave stupidly at times?
9. The end of The Inner Circle is a cliffhanger – did it leave you wanting to read the next book in the Culper Ring series? Did you feel like you needed more closure at the end?
10. Is The Inner Circle too far-fetched? How does the incorporation of – and occasionally manipulation of – U.S. history help to anchor the story?
11. Has reading The Inner Circle made you think differently about politics in the U.S.? About the Presidents? About archivists? About alleged assassins?
12. What are your final thoughts on The Inner Circle? Do you think the Culper Ring still exists today?

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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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Title: The Inner Circle

website address: www.everyonesreading.org