

Southfield Public Library

Orange is the new black by Piper Kerman

Discussion questions used at SPL October 11 & 12, 2016

Questions by LitLovers:

1. Talk about Piper Kerman. What do you think of her? Does she deserve the sentence she received?
2. How would you describe the prison culture—its hierarchy and values. What must Piper learn in order to adapt to, or even survive, prison life? Discuss about how Piper's relationships changed—both inside the prison walls and outside prison.
3. Do you have favorites among the inmates? Least favorites? Are there any inmates you come to admire? if so, why? Are there inmates who don't deserve to be in prison?
4. Talk about the relationship of the inmates with the guards and prison authorities.
5. In many ways, this is a coming-of-age story. What are the ways in which prison changes Piper? What does she come to learn about who she is?
6. Has reading *Orange Is the New Black* altered your views of the criminal justice system? Or does the memoir basically confirm what you believed?
7. Why is being sent to prison frequently referred to as "disappearing down the rabbit hole"?
8. Does our criminal justice system work? Does prison work? If you could, what would you change about the legal and/or the prison system?
9. Watch the Netflix film adaptation—either selected clips or in its entirety. How does it compare with the book?
10. Talk about homosexuality, both in Piper's life and as it exists in prison.

Questions from National Network to End Domestic Violence-nnedv.org/

What did you think about the characterizations of prison life that were made by the authors of these articles vs. Kerman's characterizations? Who are you more inclined to believe?

How well do you think Kerman depicted life behind bars for women in low-security prisons? Were there any aspects of prison life that surprised you?

How does racism and classism impact the experiences of Piper and the other inmates on the inside? And how does it impact the issues women face when re-entering society after leaving prison?

Kerman did a great job writing about the women she met in prison, and writing them in an honest, empathetic way. (We only wish she would have told us more!) Who did you most enjoy reading about – Jae, Yoga Janet, Delicious, Pop, Carlotta, Nina, Little Janet, Miss Malcolm, or someone else? Who did you want to learn more about?

While OITNB isn't fiction -- so there aren't technically any "spoilers" -- there is still plenty to react to! What did you think of the book, overall?

Questions from shmoop-

<http://www.shmoop.com/orange-is-the-new-black/questions.html>

This is a memoir so it sometimes feels like Piper is the only character. What do you want to know about the other women in jail with Piper?

Were you surprised Piper had such a relatively easy time in prison? Do you think all prison experiences are similar? How would the story be different if Piper were a man in a men's prison?

What parts of Piper's story do you wish she would talk more about? Is there anything you wish she'd have left out? Why?

Kerman has been criticized for her "white privilege." Do you think this is an appropriate criticism?

Would this book have been published if it had been written by, say, Pop or Jae or Little Janet?

Have you seen the Netflix show? (If not, get on it—we'll wait. No, we'll watch it again with you. Save us a spot on the couch.) What differences do you notice between the book and the show? Are there any details from the book that you're surprised they changed?

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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:

Discussion questions taken from a website:

website address:

LitLovers' web page-

<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/14-non-fiction/9444-orange-is-new-black-kerman?showall=1>

Comprehensive reviews and interviews:

<https://www.umass.edu/studentlife/sites/default/files/documents/Common%20Read%20Programming%20Resources.pdf>