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Book Club Kit Discussion Guide

God Don't Like Ugly
by
Mary Monroe
(New York: Dafina Books, 2000)

Author:

Mary Monroe is the third child of Alabama sharecroppers and the first and only member of my family to finish high school. She never attended college or any writing classes and taught herself how to write starting when she was four. She spent the first part of her life in Alabama and Ohio and moved to Richmond, California in 1973. Monroe has lived in Oakland since 1984. *God Don't Like Ugly* won the Oakland Pen Award for Best Fiction of the Year in 2001. [From author's web site]

Summary:

In her richly drawn debut novel, Mary Monroe brings to life the bond between two girls from opposite sides of the track—and the shattering event that changes their lives forever.

At the heart of the story is Annette Goode, a shy, awkward, overweight child who keeps a terrible secret. Mr. Boatwright, the boarder her hardworking mother has taken in, abuses her daily. Frightened and ashamed, Annette withdraws into a world of books and food.

But the summer Annette turns thirteen, something incredible happens: Rhoda Nelson chooses her as a friend. Dazzling, generous Rhoda, who is everything Annette is not—gorgeous, slim, and worldly—welcomes Annette into the heart of her eccentric family, which includes her handsome and dignified father; her lovely, fragile, “Muh'Dear;” her brooding, dangerous brother Jock; and her colorful white relatives—half-crazy Uncle Johnny, sultry Aunt Lola, and scary, surly Granny Goose.

With Rhoda's help, Annette survives adolescence and blossoms as a woman. But when her beautiful best friend makes a stunning confession about a horrific childhood crime, Annette's world will never be the same.

Set on the streets, porches and parlors of 1960s and 1970 Ohio, *God Don't Like Ugly* sparkles with clear-eyed wit and uncompromising honesty. Readers will find this remarkable new novel full of laughter, inspiration, and pure enjoyment. [From publisher's web site]

Questions:

1. Talk about the author's use of language/writing style. Have each member read his or her favorite passage out loud. (You might want to warn them ahead of time that they'll be doing this so they'll be prepared.) How does this particular passage relate to the story as a whole? Does it reveal anything specific about any of the characters or illuminate certain aspects of the story?
2. How important is the setting to the story? If applicable, discuss the time period in which the book is set. Does the author provide enough background information for you to understand the events in the story?
3. Is the author equally invested in both character and plot? Or did the author put more effort into developing the story than in creating compelling and believable characters? Were the motivations of the characters believable, or did their actions feel like a means to further the plot?
4. Would you recommend this work on the basis of its literary merit? Would you endorse it purely because of the skillful writing and the well-developed characters?
5. Is your group familiar with the author's previous works? If so, did this book live up to or exceed your expectations of the author?
6. What did you like or dislike about the book that hasn't been discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Do you want to read more work by this author?

[Questions from Reading Group Guides

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/content/index.asp> and Library Staff]