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The Book Club for Troublesome Women

by Marie Bostwick

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Discussion Questions

1. Describe Margaret's encounter with Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*. How did it reframe her life as a wife and a mother? What did the book give voice to that she'd never heard expressed before? Likewise, how did it affect Charlotte, Bitsy, and Viv in different ways?
2. If possible, describe a book you've read that has completely altered your outlook on the world. What has been the book's lasting impact on your thinking or your actions?
3. Of the four Bettys—Margaret, Bitsy, Charlotte, and Viv—which woman resonates with you the most and why?
4. Discuss the marriages in this novel. Whose were most successful? The most frustrating? Whose outcomes surprised you the most?
5. What particular struggles did the Bettys endure that women still experience today? How much has changed for American women of all stripes since the 1960s? What steps forward—and what steps backward—have been taken?
6. Did Walt's transformation by the novel's end surprise you? If so, what were you expecting of him and his story?
7. What held Charlotte back from pursuing her art, and what eventually set her free? Describe how she was able to find contentment and purpose in something she loved despite several disappointments along the way.
8. What factors led to Margaret's success as a writer? What qualities did she embody, and how crucial was her proverbial "village"?
9. For decades, women have debated the possibility or impossibility of their "having it all." In your opinion, what does having it all look like? Can having it all be attained? And how might each of the Bettys answer this question?
10. Think over some of the other women who came alongside the Bettys and broadened their horizons (such as Dr. Fran and Katharine Graham). How do the women of this novel take opportunities to "pay it forward," and how can women today do the same?
11. Which do you think was more transformative for the Bettys: the books they read together or the sisterhood and camaraderie they experienced?
12. Do you have a "village"? If so, how has the support of those friends made a difference in your life? Have you always gotten along well? Or, like the Bettys, did you experience some bumps, misunderstandings, or rifts along the way? How did you work through them?

Author Interview

Marie Bostwick is the New York Times and USA TODAY bestselling author of more than twenty works of uplifting contemporary and historical fiction.

Translated into a dozen languages, Marie's novels are beloved by readers across the globe. Her 2009 book, *A Thread of Truth*, was an "Indie Next Notable" pick. Three of her books were published as Reader's Digest "Select Editions." Marie lives in Washington state with her husband and a beautiful but moderately spoiled Cavalier King Charles spaniel.

The Book Club for Troublesome Women is a humorous, thought provoking, and nostalgic romp through one pivotal and tumultuous American year—as well as an ode to self-discovery, persistence, and the power of sisterhood.

Let's get to know Marie as she talks favorite books, inspiration behind the book, her TBR and more!

Book Club Chat - What are some of your favorite novels?

Marie Bostwick - Gosh, that could be a VERY long list. But there are a few books that I've loved enough to read over and over.

The Group, by Mary McCarthy is at the top of that list. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, by Betty Smith, runs a close second.

When did you know you wanted to become an author?

It wasn't so much that I knew, more that somebody told me I was. The short(ish) version of the story is this...

Thirty years ago, I kind of wandered into a writer's workshop on a whim. I'd been writing since I could hold a pencil, but only for myself. The idea of writing as a profession had never crossed my mind. I only went to the workshop because it was one of the activities offered when I was on vacation, and it sounded like it might be fun.

The workshop met every day for a week. I was quiet at first, just taking it all in. Around day four I volunteered to read what I'd written, and a couple more times after that. On the last day of the workshop, the instructor pulled me aside and said, "You're obviously a writer; what have you published?"

I was shocked. In fact, I argued with him, saying that I wasn't a writer, just somebody who hadn't fired her imaginary friends when she got big. He just frowned and said, "Well, what do you think writers are?"

Years would pass before I was willing to admit that I wanted to become a published author. But the fact that someone else saw me as "obviously a writer" changed the course of my life. It felt like this man knew more about me than I did about myself, that my secret identity had finally been unmasked.

I went home and, for the first time, started writing in a focused way, not just for my own entertainment but taking myself and the work seriously.

What inspired you to write *The Book Club for Troublesome Women*?

The idea was sparked about three years ago, during a conversation with my mom.

Mom is 92, but she's sharp as a tack and an avid reader. We were discussing books one evening when Betty Friedan's 1963 blockbuster, *The Feminine Mystique*, which some have credited as a catalyst for second-wave feminism, came up.

"That book changed my life," she said. "Did I ever tell you?"

She hadn't. But only minutes after she started explaining how the book had impacted her and her friends, a group of quietly unhappy housewives who couldn't understand what they felt so empty inside, I knew what I had to write next.

The characters, plot, and setting of *The Book Club for Troublesome Women* is a product of my own imagination, and quite different from Mom's experience. But her comment was the seed from which an entire book grew.

We love book clubs here! Tell us a bit more about how significant the book club is for the women in the novel.

Though they don't realize it when the story begins – Margaret proposes starting a book club almost on a whim, seeing it as a way to get to know Charlotte, the artsy, eccentric, intriguing new neighbor from New York – the book club changes everything, for all of them.

The many books they read together open their minds to new possibilities, and help them see the world and themselves in a new light. And the sisterhood through the book club becomes the glue that holds them fast through tears, triumphs, angst, and arguments.

The bond they develop will last a lifetime, but that first year they spend together will be the most consequential of their lives, and the most freeing.

What type of research went into this story?

To start with, I read *The Feminine Mystique* three or four times. I'd heard of it but never picked it up until then. It's a dense book, and an imperfect one, especially by modern standards. But in that era, the things Friedan was saying were groundbreaking and extremely controversial.

I also read books about the history of feminism and society's response to Friedan's book; the best of them was *A Strange Stirring* by Stephanie Coontz. And I read some biographies about historical figures who make cameo appearances in the book.

Of course, I did all kinds of online research. And I interviewed my mother too. Getting a firsthand take on what life was like for women before the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, and how things changed after was eye-opening.

Magazines from the 60's also played a part in the process – it's hard to overstate how influential women's magazines were at the time. I bought as many vintage copies as I could find, so I could experience them the way my characters would have.

This isn't of any real consequence but boy! Were there ever some terrible recipes back then! And the pictures were even worse. I don't know when food styling became a profession, but it was definitely after the 1960s.

What are you currently reading and what's on your TBR (to be read) list?

I've been reading a lot of terrific books lately. I just finished *The Girls of Good Fortune* by Kristina McMorris, and am currently reading *The Girl from Greenwich Street* by Lauren Willig as well as Kate Quinn's *The Briar Club*. I highly recommend all three.

The current TBR pile includes *Harlem Rhapsody* by Victoria Christopher Murray, *The Story She Left Behind* by Patti Callahan Henry, *The English Masterpiece* by Katherine Reay, and *Wayward Girls* by Susan Wiggs.

<https://bookclubchat.com/chat/qa-with-marie-bostwick-author-of-the-book-club-for-troublesome-women/>

Biography

Marie Bostwick is a New York Times and USA Today Bestseller of more than twenty works of contemporary and historical fiction.

Published in 2005 by Kensington Books, *Fields of Gold*, her first novel, was a finalist for the prestigious Oklahoma Book Award. Her second novel, *River's Edge* was an alternate selection of the Literary Guild.

Marie's novellas, *A High-Kicking Christmas* and *The Presents of Angels*, were included, respectively, in the holiday anthologies *Comfort and Joy* and *Snow Angels*, and appeared on the New York Times and USA Today bestseller lists. Her novels *The Second Sister*, *Between Heaven and Texas*, and *The Book Club for Troublesome Women* were USA Today bestsellers. A film adaptation of her book *The Second Sister*, "Christmas Everlasting," debuted on the Hallmark Channel as a Hallmark Hall of Fame feature in November 2018, starring Patti LaBelle.

Marie's novels have been translated into fourteen different languages. Three of her books, including *A Single Thread* and *A Thread So Thin* from her popular *Cobbled Court Quilt*, as well as her 2018 standalone novel, *Hope on the Inside*, were published in Reader's Digest Select Editions. *A Thread of Truth* (2009) was named an "Indie Next Notable" book by the members of the Independent Bookseller's Association.

Marie's latest novel, *The Book Club for Troublesome Women*, published by Harper Muse on April 22, 2025, was a USA Today and Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance (SIBA) bestseller. It was a monthly pick for large national book clubs including the AARP Girlfriends Book Club, Gloss Book Club, and Brenda Novak's Book Club, and has been included on numerous "most anticipated" lists, including BookBub's "Best Historical Fiction of 2025".

In addition to books, Marie writes a popular lifestyle blog, *Fiercely Marie*, that encourages readers to "live every minute and love every moment".

Marie lives in Washington state with her Brad, and their moderately spoiled Cavalier King Charles spaniel. When not writing, she enjoys reading, cooking, every fiber craft imaginable, and spending time with family and friends. Marie travels extensively, speaking at libraries, bookstores, clubs, and community events.

Reviews

THE BOOK CLUB FOR TROUBLESOME WOMEN

by Marie Bostwick • RELEASE DATE: April 22, 2025

A sugarcoated take on midcentury suburbia.

A lively and unabashedly sentimental novel examines the impact of feminism on four upper-middle-class white women in a suburb of Washington, D.C., in 1963.

Transplanted Ohioan Margaret Ryan—married to an accountant, raising three young children, and decidedly at loose ends—decides to recruit a few other housewives to form a book club. She's thinking *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, but a new friend, artistic Charlotte Gustafson, suggests Betty Friedan's brand-new *The Feminine Mystique*. They're joined by young Bitsy Cobb, who aspired to be a veterinarian but married one instead, and Vivian Buschetti, a former Army nurse now pregnant with her seventh child. The Bettys, as they christen themselves, decide to meet monthly to read feminist books, and with their encouragement of each other, their lives begin to change: Margaret starts writing a column for a women's magazine; Viv goes back to work as a nurse; Charlotte and Bitsy face up to problems with demanding and philandering husbands and find new careers of their own. The story takes in real-life figures like the Washington Post's Katharine Graham and touches on many of the tumultuous political events of 1963. Bostwick treats her characters with generosity and a heavy dose of wish-fulfillment, taking satisfying revenge on the wicked and solving longstanding problems with a few well-placed words, even showing empathy for the more well-meaning of the husbands. As historical fiction, the novel is hampered by its rosy optimism, but its take on the many micro- and macroaggressions experienced by women of the era is sound and eye-opening. Although Friedan might raise an eyebrow at the use her book's been put to, readers will cheer for Bostwick's spunky characters.

Playlist for THE BOOK CLUB FOR TROUBLESOME WOMEN A peppy, book-themed playlist is a great way to set the tone at your book club gathering. Check out my list of eight nostalgic and one contemporary tune that Troublesome Women will love!

Blame It on the Bossa Nova by Edye Gourmet This is the first song that shows up in the story and it's a very appropriate way to introduce Vivian Buschetti. Already a mother of six, Viv would love to resurrect her stalled nursing career. The fact that she finds her husband, Tony, irresistible keeps putting a wrench in her plans.

Where Did Our Love Go by The Supremes When Margaret gets a part time job, the simmering tension in her marriage bubbles over, leaving her sad and confused, wondering what happened. This song was a huge hit for the Supremes, maybe because it's one almost any married couple can identify with at some point.

These Boots Are Made for Walking by Nancy Sinatra As Charlotte Gustafson discovers, taking the risk to stand up for yourself, or even walk away, can be incredibly freeing and empowering.

Wipe Out by the Surfaris Possibly the greatest dance party tune of all time. Feel free to crank up the volume and bust a move, just like Bitsy and the Bettys do in the story.

You Don't Own Me by Lesley Gore An anthem for all women who find the courage to value themselves.

With a Little Help From My Friends by The Beatles Women supporting each other is a huge theme in the book. Each of the four characters is transformed during the story, but none of them could have done it alone.

Dreams of the Everyday Housewife by Glen Campbell The fact that a tune about a woman who gives up on her dreams and herself made it to number 3 on the Billboard Hot Country Singles in 1968 should be a cautionary tale. That's why, even though I loathe the song, I'm including it on this playlist.

Respect by Aretha Franklin Respect. It's what every woman wants and deserves, for themselves and from others. Margaret, Charlotte, Viv, and Bitsy don't settle for anything less. Neither should anybody else.

Woman's World by Katy Perry Let's wrap up with contemporary tune that cuts to the chase, "It's a woman's world and you're lucky to be livin' in it... Baby, we ain't goin' away."

Troublesome Book Club Cocktails & Mocktails

During the first meeting of the book club, the women are hesitant to open up so the conversation drags initially. All that changes once Charlotte marches into Margaret's kitchen and finds the liquor, mixing up a batch of tongue-loosening cocktails she called, "Truth Serum." The bright green beverages Charlotte serves are actually vodka stingers, but they do have the desired effect. After a few sips, the Bettys start sharing stories and secrets, and building a bond. I'm sharing two delicious beverage recipes that are perfect for every member of your book club. The first is for a classic vodka stinger, a popular cocktail during the 60s. The second is a yummy, minty-flavored mocktail. Mix some up for your book club gathering, and raise a glass to Troublesome Women!

Classic Vodka Stingers

2 oz vodka

1 oz crème de menthe

Pour vodka and crème de menthe into an ice-filled cocktail shaker. Shake vigorously, then pour into cocktail glasses. Serve immediately.

Stingless Stingers

2 oz mint simple syrup (see instructions)

2 oz white grape juice

3 oz cucumber flavored tonic water

To make the mint simple syrup, combine ½ cup sugar, ½ cup water, and ½ a bunch of fresh mint into a heavy bottomed saucepan or pot. Heat on stove over medium heat, stirring, until syrup begins to bubble. Lower heat, simmer for 1-2 minutes. Strain out mint. Cool syrup completely in the refrigerator before using.

Pour mint simple syrup and white grape juice together in a glass of ice. Top with cucumber flavored tonic water. Serve immediately.