



The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society Reader's Guide

BY ANNIE BARROWS MARY ANN SHAFFER

Category: Historical Fiction |
Literary Fiction | Women's Fiction

READERS GUIDE

Celebrating literature, love, and the power of the human spirit, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* is the story of an English author living in the shadow of World War II—and embarking on a writing project that will dramatically change her life. Unfolding in a series of letters, this enchanting novel introduces readers to the indomitable Juliet Ashton. Through Juliet's correspondence with her publisher, best friend, and an absorbing cast of characters, readers discover that despite the personal losses she suffered in the Blitz, and author tours sometimes marked by mishaps, nothing can quell her enthusiasm for the written word. One day, she begins a different sort of correspondence, responding to a man who found her name on the flyleaf of a cherished secondhand book. He tells her that his name is Dawsey Adams, a native resident of Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands recently liberated from Nazi occupation. Soon Juliet is drawn into Dawsey's remarkable circle of friends, courageous men and women who formed the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society as a cover to protect them from the Germans. With their appetite for good books, and their determination to honor the island's haunting recent history, this is a community that opens Juliet's heart and mind in ways she could never have imagined.

The questions and discussion topics that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows's *Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society*. We hope they will enrich your experience of this captivating novel.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. What was it like to read a novel composed entirely of letters? What do letters offer that no other form of writing (not even emails) can convey?

2. What makes Sidney and Sophie ideal friends for Juliet? What common ground do they share? Who has been a similar advocate in your life?

3. Dawsey first wrote to Juliet because books, on Charles Lamb or otherwise, were so difficult to obtain on Guernsey in the aftermath of the war. What differences did you note between bookselling in the novel and bookselling in your world? What makes book lovers unique, across all generations?

4. What were your first impressions of Dawsey? How was he different from the other men Juliet had known?

5. Discuss the poets, novelists, biographers, and other writers who capture the hearts of the members of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society. What does a reader's taste in books say about his or her personality? Whose lives were changed the most by membership in the society?

6. Juliet occasionally receives mean-spirited correspondence from strangers, accusing both Elizabeth and Juliet of being immoral. What accounts for their judgmental ways?

7. In what ways were Juliet and Elizabeth kindred spirits? What did Elizabeth's spontaneous invention of the society, as well as her brave final act, say about her approach to life?

8. Numerous Guernsey residents give Juliet access to their private memories of the occupation. Which voices were most memorable for you? What was the effect of reading a variety of responses to a shared tragedy?

9. Kit and Juliet complete each other in many ways. What did they need from each other? What qualities make Juliet an unconventional, excellent mother?

10. How did Remy's presence enhance the lives of those on Guernsey? Through her survival, what recollections, hopes, and lessons also survived?

11. Juliet rejects marriage proposals from a man who is a stereotypical "great catch." How would you have handled Juliet's romantic entanglement? What truly makes someone a "great catch"?

12. What was the effect of reading a novel about an author's experiences with writing, editing, and getting published? Did this enhance the book's realism, though Juliet's experience is a bit different from that of debut novelist Mary Ann Shaffer and her niece, children's book author Annie Barrows?

13. What historical facts about life in England during World War II were you especially surprised to discover? What traits, such as remarkable stamina, are captured in a detail such as potato peel pie? In what ways does fiction provide a means for more fully understanding a non-fiction truth?

14. Which of the members of the Society is your favorite? Whose literary opinions are most like your own?

15. Do you agree with Isola that "reading good books ruins you for enjoying bad ones"?
