



Book Club Questions

Liberty Street by Heather Marshall

Icebreaker Question:

If you could ask one woman from Liberty Street a question about her experience, who would you choose, and what would you want to know?

1. Why do you think Marshall titled the book Liberty Street? Released women walked out of the prison gates onto that street. What does it mean that "liberty" sat just outside the walls of a place that took it away?
2. The novel explores many kinds of "prisons" (physical, social, emotional, and family). Which characters were trapped in ways that had nothing to do with bars? Did anyone achieve true freedom by the end?
3. Women could be committed for being "incorrigible," pregnant out of wedlock, or simply not wanting to marry. What does this law reveal about how society treats people who don't fit its norms? Do you see echoes of it today?
4. What motivated Emily to go undercover: ambition, a sense of social justice, or a desire to follow in her father's footsteps? Can it be all three?
5. Emily learns that getting into Mercer was easy, but getting out might be impossible. Did she underestimate the system? At what moment did her perspective shift?
6. Did Emily take unnecessary risks, especially as her release approached? Would you have made the same choices?
7. Many people outside Mercer knew what was happening or chose not to question it. Where do you think responsibility lies, with the individuals running the institution, the government that permitted it, or the society that accepted it?
8. How did Dr. Stone justify her treatment of the women at Mercer? What allowed her to operate without accountability, and what does her character reveal about the abuse of institutional power?
9. Which relationship or act of solidarity among the women was most memorable to you? How did these connections help them survive?



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10. Which inmate's history shocked or moved you the most?
11. How did Rachel's personal history shape her approach to the unidentified remains case? Did her past make her a better investigator?
12. How does moving back and forth between 1961 and 1996 affect the story's pacing and emotional weight? Which timeline did you prefer, and why?
13. How did you react to discovering that the remains in the unmarked grave belonged to Annie? What significance did you find in the fact that she could not be buried near her family?
14. How did this book make you feel overall? Did it change how you think about the women in your own family history and the choices they may or may not have had?

Book club questions by Princeton Book Review.