



Book Club Questions
The Queens of Crime by Marie Benedict

1. The novel opens with the main character and narrator, mystery writer Dorothy L. Sayers, speculating that “None of us is as we appear.” How does this notion permeate the novel? Does the dichotomy between perception and reality manifest in the characters and the events in the story?
2. Had you heard of Dorothy before reading *The Queens of Crime*? Aside from the famous Agatha Christie, were you familiar with the three other successful authors of detective fiction who play significant roles: Baroness Emma Orczy, Ngaio Marsh, and Margery Allingham? Which of the women, if any, did you find to be the most relatable?
3. The book offers a glimpse into the writerly existence, the mundane details like deadlines as well as the nature of inspiration. Did real life provide a spark for Dorothy’s novels? Were you surprised at the interplay between fact and fiction, and does it make you wonder about the origin behind other novels you’ve read?
4. The women at the heart of *The Queens of Crime* were successful writers, which was unusual for their time. What was the nature of each woman’s journey to writing, and who had to overcome the most in order to do so? How did their desire to receive just recognition for their accomplishments shape the course of the story?
5. In an homage to the great detective fiction of the sort penned by these women, *The Queens of Crime* is structured like a classic mystery novel. What did you learn as you unlocked each layer of the mysteries—from the puzzle of May’s murder to the nature of Dorothy’s secret?
6. The five “Queens of Crime” hailed from different social strata, economic backgrounds, and countries, and even their ages varied by decades. In light of these disparities, did you anticipate that they’d form a sisterhood? What, if anything, did they have to address in order to band together? Did their differences ultimately serve as a hindrance or a help?
7. During their investigation into May Daniels’s murder, Dorothy, Agatha, Ngaio, and Margery encounter widespread prejudicial attitudes toward certain groups of women, particularly “surplus women.” Did this perspective fuel either the murder or its resolution? How did you feel about this point of view?



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8. How successful were the women as detectives? Did they find writing about detectives very different from playing the part? Did the identity of the murderer—and what it says about society at that time—surprise you?
9. Many of the characters in the novel harbor secrets, especially Dorothy and May. How do those hidden truths affect the trajectory of the story? Would these secrets hold the same power today?
10. Consider the legacy of Dorothy and the other “Queens of Crime.” While Agatha Christie’s fame continues to this day, the others’ renown does not. Is it possible to leave behind an important legacy, even if your name and narrative have disappeared into the past? Why might certain of the women have been forgotten, despite their popularity during their lifetimes?
11. How did you feel about the end of *The Queens of Crime*? Was justice done for May Daniels? Did Dorothy, Agatha, Ngaio, Margery, and Emma receive the appreciation from the Detection Club that they sought? Would such measures have been necessary today?

Book club questions from the author’s [Book Club Kit](#)