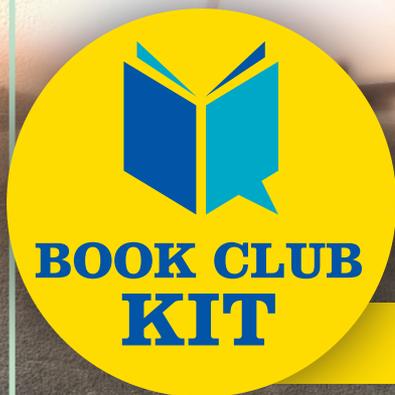


A NOVEL INSPIRED BY REAL
FEMALE PILOTS DURING WORLD WAR II

THE FLIGHT GIRLS



READER'S GUIDE

NOELLE SALAZAR

Discussion Guide

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. Women served many important roles during World War II. This book touches on the female pilots who helped train soldiers. What other ways did women contribute to the war effort?
2. Did you know about the Women Airforce Service Pilots program? If so, how did you learn about it? If not, were you surprised to learn of its existence?
3. The story hosts a rich cast of characters, from Audrey's roommates in Hawaii to the girls she trains with in the Women Airforce Service Pilots program. Who was your favorite character and why?
4. The pilots in the story face a lot of discrimination from male officers who don't expect them to have the strength or brains to fly warplanes. Do you think society has come a long way since those days, or do men still discriminate against women in certain lines of work?
5. Audrey feels as if she's very different from her mother, yet they share some similarities. What do you think they have in common?
6. From the very beginning of the story, Audrey expresses her need for freedom. She doesn't want what so many others want—marriage and family—and is okay with being alone. Do you believe she could truly be happy without someone to share her life with, as so many of her friends tell her she must have?
7. Did you feel Audrey made the right choice in holding out for James instead of accepting Carter's proposal?
8. Do you find Audrey hypocritical to her lifelong wish to lead a solitary life when she decides to marry and have children with James in the end?
9. If you were making a movie of this book, which actors would you cast?
10. If you could read this story from another character's point of view, which one would you choose?

Discussion Guide

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR



What inspired you to write *The Flight Girls*?

Noelle: That era in our history has intrigued me since I watched my first documentary about WWII in junior high school. It was a turning point for our country—and for women. They stepped out of the shadows of men and showed the world how strong they truly were. How much they could endure. And how smart, willing and able. Reading their stories and learning of their bravery moved me, and it became more a question of how could I not write this story? It may be fictional, but there is a lot of truth in these pages, and I can only hope I did this particular group of women justice.

When and how did you learn about the WASP program?

Noelle: At some point during junior high or high school, probably in one of my much-loved history classes, I learned of the WASP. I didn't know much more than that they were women who flew military planes during the war, and I never looked to find more information about them during that time, but it stuck with me so much so that when I saw a book about them, I immediately knew who they were—and didn't mistake them for a bunch of angry bees.

Did you meet and interview any living WASP women?

Noelle: Thanks to the wonders of social media and the graciousness of a helpful stranger on Twitter whose grandmother was a WASP, I was given the phone number of one Mrs. (Mildred) Jane Doyle, the last living WASP in Michigan. From the moment she answered the phone, I knew our conversation would be a good one. She was feisty, good-natured and had a mischievous laugh. And she reminded me of my nana. She was happy to answer my questions, which were mostly regarding a day in the life at Avenger, information that was hard to find from websites and books that mostly stuck to facts, rather than anyone's personal day-to-day life. Speaking to an actual WASP was emotional for me—and an honor.

What other kind of research went into writing the book?

Noelle: Before writing the first draft, I read through a few books and then scoured the internet for more information. As time went on and I found an agent, we did the first big edit of the book, which led me to returning to the internet and finding more facts I hadn't read previously. Upon signing my book deal, my editor and I entered into yet another editing session and again, I unearthed several previously unknown to me details. And then, in October 2017, I went to Sweetwater, Texas, and Avenger Field myself and wandered the WASP museum in absolute awe. To stand where they stood, looking up at the skies they trained in... It was magic.

Discussion Guide

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR



Is there a character in the story that you identify with? Or a favorite character among the varied cast?

Noelle: It feels easy to say Audrey—but I admire her gumption, her willingness to evolve and her bravery as she kept moving forward despite the heartbreak, immeasurable losses and fears. There are other characters though that I would love to explore further. Ruby, a bit player, was fun to write. I'd love to see her journey before the war. And Nola seems like a complex woman, another whose eyes I'd love to see through. Carol Ann might steal my heart though. She was the perfect best friend. A little naughty, incredibly loyal and full of life.

What was the most challenging part of writing this book? What was the most enjoyable?

Noelle: Keeping the dates aligned was the biggest challenge of writing this book. I kept a timeline of the war beside me, picking and choosing events to help guide my story. If anything big in the story was edited out or switched around, I had to scramble to make sure the dates still lined up. I'm not sure I always succeeded. Also, keeping the language true to the time period, but not overdoing it to distract from the story, was sometimes difficult. The most enjoyable parts for me were the character interactions. I love connection. Human desire. To be seen, loved, needed, appreciated. To have that denied. To watch what unfolds. Do they pick themselves up or do they falter? The intricacies of the human condition are intriguing to write.

Is World War II a setting that particularly interests you? If so, why?

Noelle: I've loved WWII history since childhood. Knowing my Papa fought in it made it more personal. Knowing he signed up at the ripe old age of sixteen made him my hero—he's even in a book dedicated to the underage soldiers of WWII—and ignited a fire in me to know more. I wanted all the stories: the good, the bad, the tragic, the unbelievable. On the flip side of that coin was my nana, his tiny, tough-as-nails wife. They wed the same year he enlisted and she stayed home to prepare for the baby girl they were expecting—the same baby girl who many years later in 2011 had a stack of books sitting on her living room floor about a special group of female pilots as she studied to be a docent for the new WASP exhibit at the Museum of Flight in Seattle that opened that year and continues today. My papa never lost his stern master sergeant voice. It echoed down the stairs as he shouted at us to stop running on them. But he also spoiled us with hugs, endured our bad movie choices and homemade plays and let us drive the golf cart. The Second World War shaped him as a man, and because of that, shaped his relationship with his wife, shaped his children and his grandchildren.

Discussion Guide

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR



Can you describe your writing process? Do you tend to outline first or dive right in and figure out the details as you go along?

Noelle: I never start a story until I know the ending. Until I can see it and it gives me goosebumps. I like to know where I'm going, but how I'm going to get there is always a mystery—and a fun one at that. I am definitely a pantser—but my left brain likes to butt in at times for a little direction, which I find useful for those moments I begin veering off course. Usually I pick three things I want to happen in a chapter, and then sit back and let my characters get me there. Also, the atmosphere may change depending on the genre of story I'm working on. The first book I ever wrote was dark and moody, so I wrote with the lights off and haunting music playing in the background. For *The Flight Girls*, I wrote at a desk with no music and nearly absolute silence. I had a serious job to get done and facts to follow. For my newest work in progress, I find myself feeling a bit wistful. I daydream about it often and sometimes write a sentence or two in passing, while other times I sit in bed late at night, the quiet of the house lending a romance to a story that both intrigues me and makes me feel like a young girl again.

Can you tell us anything else about what you're working on next?

Noelle: *The Lightkeeper* is another story following the theme of a woman having to not only make tough choices, but also to determine which are the right choices. It is about the bonds of friendship and family, and how they can drive our decisions—but sometimes blind us, as well.