

Book Club Kit



Dear book club reader,

I love book clubs—I belong to two of them myself! We currently meet on Zoom because of COVID-19. I really miss the face-to-face gatherings (not to mention the food and drinks!), but it's still great to see friends and talk about a book we've all read.

The characters are always among our favorite topics. Someone will say, "Remember the part where so-and-so did such and such?" and the conversation will be off and running. Often a member will share about a time when something similar happened to her. Further discussion—and often hilarity—ensues.

My favorite characters to both read and write about are complex and flawed, because that's how real people are. The best-intentioned people make mistakes and bad choices; the most hardened criminal can have a tender side. We're all shaped by both nature and nurture. Childhood experiences, especially, leave a deep and lasting impact. Because we don't have all the pertinent information about most people, though, we can't always understand why they do the things they do.

That's why I love to read novels: they help me make sense of life. I get to see the character's thoughts and learn about their past experiences.

In *She Gets That from Me*, most of the characters are pretty easy to relate to. Lily is an adorable three-year-old grieving her mother. Quinn is a quirky, talented young woman with trust issues—which is understandable, considering that her parents were neglectful and self-absorbed. Miss Margaret is a spirited older woman who thinks that bloodlines are more significant than choice-based relationships because of her early experiences. Zack is a stand-up guy who wants to do the right thing, but he's gotten himself into a real moral quandary.

And then there's Jessica. Some characters are just more challenging than others—to writers as well as to readers. After the first draft, I tried taking out Jessica's point of view and starting the book with Zack already being divorced. I thought it would make for a more straightforward story, but I just couldn't seem to write it. I kept hearing Jessica's voice, and I realized she was integral to the story.

I wanted to write about a successful woman experiencing the pain of infertility. Not being able to start a family with her husband was the only obstacle she'd ever encountered that she couldn't conquer with hard work, determination, or money—and yet here was another woman, a stranger, doing what she couldn't do: raising her husband's child and having his baby. Some of the things Jessica did and thought weren't very likeable, but hopefully her decisions and actions are understandable in light of the situation, her insecurities, and her unexamined value system. And watching her mature as a person was inspiring to me.

I always want my characters to change and grow as the result of the events they go through and the choices they make in my novels. In this one, they all start at differing points of awareness about themselves and others, and they have differing definitions of success and limits on what they'll do to achieve it. They end up at differing end points, as well. But one thing they all share throughout the story is a yearning for family.

I think this is an intrinsic human desire. I think everyone has a deep-down need to love and be loved, to belong to a special, close-knit group—a family—where we feel completely accepted and supported.

Writing this book gave me a renewed appreciation for the loved ones in my life. I hope reading it did the same for you!

All my best,

ROBIN

RobinWells.com

robin@robinwells.com

Food and Drink

I currently live in Houston, but I lived in Louisiana for twenty-seven years. If there's one thing New Orleanians know how to do well, it's eat and party! Here are some of my favorite recipes that would be perfect for a book club get-together:

HOT SPINACH ARTICHOKE DIP

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 small chopped onion (½ cup)

4 cloves crushed or finely minced garlic

10 ounce box frozen chopped spinach, thawed and pressed between paper towels to remove moisture

8 ounce cream cheese

1 cup sour cream

½ cup Parmesan cheese

14 ounce can or jar of marinated artichoke hearts, drained and coarsely chopped

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

½ teaspoon Cajun spice (I use Tony Chachere's or Slap Ya Mama) or cayenne pepper (if desired)

1 ½ cup shredded mozzarella (divided in half for different uses)

1 tablespoon chopped parsley

Toasted baguette slices, pita chips, crackers, and/or sliced raw vegetables (for dipping)



Sauteé onion in olive oil on stove until nearly transparent. Add garlic and spinach, and lightly cook.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Coat a baking dish or skillet with cooking spray or olive oil.

Combine sautéed spinach mix with cream cheese, sour cream, Parmesan cheese, artichoke hearts, seasonings, and ¾ cup of mozzarella (use the sautéed skillet or a clean bowl). Stir until combined. Spread into baking dish. Top with remaining shredded mozzarella.

Bake for 20 minutes or until bubbly and cheese is melted. Turn oven to broil for a minute or two, until top cheese just starts to brown.

Remove, sprinkle with parsley, and enjoy!

If any is left over (doubtful), add some cooked shrimp, reheat, and serve over pasta. Yum!

JAMBALAYA

3 tablespoons olive oil • 2 boneless chicken breasts, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 pound andouille sausage, cut into thin rounds • 1 pound large fresh shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 yellow onion • 3 celery stalks, diced • 3 bell peppers: 1 red, 1 yellow, 1 green
4 cloves garlic, minced • 1 14 ounce can crushed or petite-cut tomatoes
3-4 cups chicken stock • 1½ cups long-grained white rice
2 tablespoons Cajun seasoning (I like Tony Chachere's or Slap Ya Mama; use more to taste.)
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper • 1 teaspoon dried thyme
⅓ cup chopped fresh parsley • ⅓ cup chopped green onion

Preheat 1 tablespoon olive oil in large pot over medium high heat. Add chicken and sausage and sauté, stirring occasionally, until chicken is cooked through and sausage is lightly brown. Remove to a plate.

Add remaining olive oil. Cook onion, celery, bell peppers, and garlic until onions soften. Add can of tomatoes, rice, chicken stock, Cajun seasoning, thyme, cayenne, and stir. Continue cooking until it reaches a simmer. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer for about 25-30 minutes, or until the rice is nearly cooked through, stirring every 5 minutes or so.

Add the shrimp. Continue to simmer until the shrimp are cooked through and pink.

Stir in the chicken, sausage, about ¼ cup of the parsley, and ¼ cup of the green onion.

Taste. Add additional Cajun seasoning, cayenne, or salt and cracked pepper, if needed.

Remove from heat. Garnish with remaining parsley and green onion. Serves 8.

WINE

My go-to wine for book club is La Vieille Ferme (French for “The Old Farm”), which is very popular in the New Orleans area. It was the house wine at La Provence, a wonderful French restaurant on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain. Everyone called it “Chicken Wine,” because nobody could remember the name, but everyone remembered the chickens on the label. You could go into the liquor department at local grocery stores and ask for “Chicken Wine,” and the staff would know what you meant!



PUMPKIN BREAD PUDDING

with WHISKEY CREAM SAUCE

Bread pudding is a classic Louisiana dessert. I discovered this fall version, and it's become a favorite with my family and friends. I use walnuts and toast them in advance. The nuts are delicious on salads and many other things! You can make all of this ahead of time. Store pudding, sauce, and nuts separately. Before serving, reheat bread pudding in a low oven, then rewarm the sauce in the microwave or on the stovetop.

FOR THE BREAD PUDDING:

1 tablespoon softened butter
6 large eggs
3 cups heavy cream (you can use half and half)
2/3 cup pumpkin puree
1/3 cup maple syrup
1 tablespoon pumpkin pie spice
1 pound loaf cinnamon-raisin bread cut into 3/4-inch cubes

FOR THE WHISKEY SAUCE:

1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup heavy cream
1/3 cup whiskey

For the bread pudding: Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Coat 9x13 baking pan with 1 tablespoon butter.

Whisk together eggs, pumpkin puree, heavy cream, maple syrup, and pumpkin pie spice until smooth. Add bread cubes and let stand at least 5 minutes. Pour into prepared baking pan. Bake 40–45 minutes until golden brown and center is set. The bread pudding will rise as it bakes and deflate once it's cooled from the oven.

For the whiskey sauce: Mix ingredients in 2-quart saucepan and warm over low heat, constantly stirring, until sauce is gently boiling.

Pour warm sauce over baked bread pudding, top with toasted walnuts or pecans, and serve.

Toasted walnuts or pecans: Cover a cookie sheet with aluminum foil. Lightly cover with olive oil. Spread out nuts and turn to coat with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt. Bake in preheated oven for 3 minutes; turn nuts and toast 2–3 more minutes, until they just start to brown. Remove from oven. Let cool.

Discussion Questions

- 1 Quinn says that early childhood experiences affect people permanently. Discuss how early family experiences shape the following characters: Zack, Quinn, Brett, Jessica, Margaret, and Lily. How did your childhood affect you?
- 2 Margaret thinks that every child deserves to know both biological parents. What do you think? Is this always true?
- 3 Discuss the ways some of the different characters in this book—Margaret, Quinn, Lily, Jessica, Zack, and Brett—had different definitions and expectations of family.
- 4 Some of the characters in the book decide to be single parents. What unique challenges do they face compared to parents who have a partner to help them? How were these parents able to succeed in the face of these additional demands? What do you think are qualities essential to being a good parent?
- 5 Discuss how the following characters grew and changed during the course of the book: Quinn, Jessica, Zack, and Margaret.
- 6 Brett tells Jessica that peace of mind only comes from living out your values. Is he right? Jessica realizes she'd focused on hitting goals and had never given much thought to values. What kind of values matter in life? What are yours?
- 7 Margaret reflects on how people are constantly affecting and influencing the lives of those close to us, whether we know it or not. What are some ways the characters in the book influenced each other's lives? Can you think of a trait you possess that you got from a relative or friend?
- 8 Margaret believes that blood is thicker than water. What do you think? Do genetic connections make the strongest family ties?



Robin Wells

Robin Wells was an advertising and public relations executive before becoming a full-time writer. She always dreamed of writing novels—a dream inspired by a grandmother who told “hot tales” and parents who were both librarians. Her books have won the RWA Golden Heart, two National Readers’ Choice Awards, the HOLT Medallion, and numerous other awards. She now lives in Texas with her husband, but will always be a Louisiana girl at heart.

RobinWells.com • [f Robin-Wells-Author-117677231588045](https://www.facebook.com/RobinWellsAuthor)