



STUTTGART BOOK CLUB READING GUIDE

Chocolat by Joanne Harris

About This Book

Chocolat begins with the arrival in a tiny French village of Vianne Rocher, a single mother with a young daughter, on Shrove Tuesday. As the inhabitants of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes clear away the remains of the carnival which heralds the beginning of Lent, Vianne moves with her daughter into a disused bakery facing the church, where Francis Reynaud, the young and opinionated curé of the parish, watches her arrival with disapproval and suspicion.

When he realizes that Vianne intends to open a chocolate shop in place of the old bakery, thereby tempting the churchgoers to over-indulgence, Reynaud's disapproval increases. As it becomes clear that the villagers of Lansquenet are falling under the spell of Vianne's easy ways and unorthodox opinions, to the detriment of his own authority, he is quick to see her as a danger. Under Vianne's influence an old woman embraces a new life, a battered wife finds the courage to leave her husband, children rebel against authority, outcasts and strays are welcomed... and Reynaud's tight and carefully ordered community is in danger of breaking apart. As Easter approaches, both parties throw themselves whole-heartedly into the preparations; Vianne for the chocolate festival she plans to hold on Easter Sunday, Reynaud into a desperate attempt to win back his straying flock. Both factions have a great deal at stake; the village is bitterly divided; and as the big day looms closer their struggle becomes much more than a conflict between church and chocolate - it becomes an exorcism of the past, a declaration of independence, a showdown between dogma and understanding, pleasure and self-denial.

Discussion Questions

1. To what extent is Reynaud the villain of the piece? Is it possible to understand or sympathise with the motivations and feelings behind his actions?
 2. Reynaud and Vianne seem to be natural enemies from the start, and yet they both have significant elements in common: a haunted past, a desire for acceptance. How do you think this affects their relationship?
 3. The preparation and eating of food is described in detail in many parts of the book. What is the significance of this, and what do the attitudes of the main characters towards food show about their personalities?
 4. The author uses the first-person narrative voice for both of her principal characters. Why do you feel she does this, and how effective is each in showing the character's attitudes and motivations?
 5. Vianne appears to other people as a strong and confident woman, but is secretly filled with fears and insecurities. To what extent do you think she has been strengthened or damaged by her relationship with her bohemian mother?
 6. The themes of moving on and settling down recur frequently in the book. Why do you think Vianne wants so badly to remain in the village? Do you think she eventually decides to stay?
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Author Biography



Joanne Harris was born in Yorkshire in 1964, the daughter of a French mother and an English father.

She studied modern and mediaeval languages at Saint Catharine's College, Cambridge, and after a number of heroic career failures (rock musician, herbalist, accountant) she succumbed to genetic pressure and became a French teacher for 12 years at a boys' grammar school in Leeds, having at last reached the conclusion that if you can take this, you can take anything. Her first novel, *The Evil Seed*, was published in 1989, although she strongly advises against reading it.

Since then she has written; *Sleep, Pale Sister* (1993); *Chocolat* (1999); *Blackberry Wine* (2000); *Five Quarters of the Orange* (2001) and *Coastliners* (2002). She gave up teaching four years ago to write full-time, and still lives in Yorkshire with her husband, her nine-year old daughter Anouchka and 2001 invisible rabbits.

Extras

[Author's Website](#)