

Book Club Kits!



About the Author:

Paula McLain was born in Fresno, California in 1965. After being abandoned by both parents, she and her two sisters became wards of the California Court System, moving in and out of various foster homes for the next fourteen years. When she aged out of the system, she supported herself by working as a nurses aid in a convalescent hospital, a pizza delivery girl, an auto-plant worker, a cocktail waitress—before discovering she could (and very much wanted to) write. She received her MFA in poetry from the University of Michigan in 1996.

She is the author of *The Paris Wife*, a *New York Times* and international bestseller, which has been published in thirty-four languages. The recipient of fellowships from Yaddo, The MacDowell Colony, the Cleveland Arts Prize, the Ohio Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, she is also the author of two collections of poetry; a memoir, *Like Family*, *Growing up in Other People's Houses*; and a first novel, *A Ticket to Ride*. She lives with her family in Cleveland.

<http://paulamclain.com/about-paula/>



Inside the kit:

(8) book copies

(1) book club guide

About the Book:

Brought to Kenya from England as a child and then abandoned by her mother, Beryl is raised by both her father and the native Kipsigis tribe who share his estate. Her unconventional upbringing transforms Beryl into a bold young woman with a fierce love of all things wild and an inherent understanding of nature's delicate balance. But even the wild child must grow up, and when everything Beryl knows and trusts dissolves, she is catapulted into a string of disastrous relationships.

Beryl forges her own path as a horse trainer, and her uncommon style attracts the eye of the Happy Valley set, a decadent, bohemian community of European expats who also live and love by their own set of rules. But it's the ruggedly charismatic Denys Finch Hatton who ultimately helps Beryl navigate the uncharted territory of her own heart. The intensity of their love reveals Beryl's truest self and her fate: to fly.

Set against the majestic landscape of early-twentieth-century Africa, McLain's powerful tale reveals the extraordinary adventures of a woman before her time, the exhilaration of freedom and its cost, and the tenacity of the human spirit. (From the author's website)

Suggested Reads:

Weldon, Fay
Before the War

Raybourn, Deanna
A Spear of Summer Grass

Jeffries, Dinah
The Tea Planter's Wife

1. At the beginning of the book, Beryl reflects that her father's farm in Njoro was "the one place in the world I'd been made for." Do you feel this is a fitting way to describe Beryl's relationship with Kenya, too? Did she seem more suited—more made for—life there than the others in her circle? Is there a place in your life that you would describe the same way?
2. While it is clear he loved his daughter, do you feel Beryl's father was a good parent? Do you think Beryl would have said he was? Did you sympathize with him at any point?
3. Beryl is forced to be independent from a very young age. How do you think this shaped her personality (for better or for worse)?
4. After Jock's drunken attack, D fires Beryl and sends her away. Do you understand his decision? Despite all the philandering and indulgent behaviors of the community, do you feel it's fair that Beryl was being judged so harshly for the incident?
5. How would you describe Beryl and Denys's relationship? In what ways are they similar souls? How does their first encounter—outside, under the stars at her coming out party—encapsulate the nature of their connection?
6. Karen and Beryl are two strong, iconoclastic women drawn to the same unobtainable man. Do you understand how Beryl could pursue Denys even though he was involved with Karen? Did you view the friendship between the women as a true one, despite its complications?
7. Why do you believe the author chose the title *Circling the Sun*? Does it bring to mind a particular moment from the novel or an aspect of Beryl's character?
8. When Beryl is quite young, she reflects that "softness and helplessness got you nothing in this place." Do you agree with her? Or do you think Beryl placed too much value on strength and independence?
9. When Beryl becomes a mother herself, she is determined not to act as her own mother did. Do you feel she succeeds? How does motherhood spur her decision to exchange horse training for flying? Could you identify with this choice?
10. After Paddy the lion attacks Beryl, Bishon Singh says, "Perhaps you were never meant for him." Do you think that Beryl truly discovered what she was meant for by the end of the novel?
11. What was your favorite element of the novel? Your least favorite?
12. Is there a path not taken that you wish you could experience? If so, what is it? Do you feel you ultimately made the right decision?