

Book Club Discussion Starters

MY MOTHER'S SHADOW by Nikola Scott

About the book

It is the year 1958 and Elizabeth Holloway has been sent away from her London home to spend the summer at Hartland, a beautiful, rambling country estate by the Sussex coast. To lovely, innocent Elizabeth, the Shaws are the height of sophistication and they treat her as one of their own, but when she falls in love, no one warns her that her dreams are dangerously naïve.

Forty years later, Elizabeth's daughter Addie finds a stranger on her doorstep, a woman claiming to be her twin sister. At first, Addie refuses to believe it — until her beloved father admits that the circumstances surrounding her birth were not what she'd been led to believe.

The discovery challenges everything Addie thought she knew about the brilliant, difficult woman that was her mother. And as their journey takes them back to Elizabeth's past, Addie and her new sister Phoebe uncover the extraordinary story of a lost child, a mother's secret, and one golden summer that changed a woman's life forever.

Questions

1. From the moment Addie first opens the door to Phoebe, the two women approach the situation in a very different way: one impatient to know everything all at once, the other trying to take in the truth little by little. At the same time, characters such as Venetia, Andrew and Mrs Baxter show a variety of reactions to the news: denial, excitement, possibility, understanding. That 'doorstep moment' was the original seed of *My Mother's Shadow*, a starting point from which to probe more deeply into the emotional fall-out from such a massive discovery. Which of the characters' behaviour do you personally feel most drawn to and why? How would *you* feel in that very moment?
2. In contrast to Venetia and Phoebe, Addie has a rather reticent personality at the beginning. She craves stability and security and is wary of leaving her comfort zone. What has made her become that person? And, more importantly, at what point(s) in the story does she start finding her courage?
3. On the other end of the spectrum, Phoebe has courage galore, but what is it that *she* needs to learn? What is her emotional journey over the course of the story?
4. While we can see right into the heart and mind of young Liz in the diary entries, we view the grown-up Elizabeth only through Addie's eyes and she comes across as a difficult and unpredictable woman. Why, after all that they went through together, did Elizabeth have such a hard time relating to her oldest

daughter? At the very end, having read the diary entries in their entirety, do you empathise or at least understand Elizabeth's behaviour?

5. Are the other mother figures in the story easy to understand? Are they sympathetic or did you find yourself constantly questioning their choices? Shouldn't Constance have prepared her daughter differently for what was in store for her, for example? Was she right to send Liz away so as not to witness her death? And shouldn't Mrs Roberts have questioned the source of the baby and then been upfront with Phoebe when the truth was discovered? In what way does learning their motives and getting to know their personalities as the story unfolds change your view of these women?
6. The relationship between Venetia and Elizabeth was very different to the one between Addie and her mother. Why is that and why does Venetia so adamantly refuse to accept Phoebe's story?
7. Graham was a mediator and buffer between his wife and eldest daughter as well as an emotional anchor for Addie. Should he have done more to ease the strained relationship between the two women?
8. "We should talk about her more. We should talk about her all the time. It's the only way to remember people, to talk about them." Graham does come to an important conclusion about the way he's been coping with his wife's death and what needs to change. What does this final insight mean, not only for his personal journey but for Addie's, Venetia's and even Liz / Elizabeth's as well?
9. Addie and her mother never have a chance to make up their differences in the end, while Elizabeth and Phoebe never meet at all. Would you have wished for them to do so or did the novel end exactly the way you wanted it to?
10. What did you think about Phoebe's choice to become a single mother at the very end? Too extreme? Or introducing a deliberate note of optimism, given the cruel and harsh treatment her own mother received forty years ago?
11. Countless women have suffered a similar experience to Liz's during that time period. They were stigmatised and victimised, lost a child or forced to make a decision that would haunt them all their lives. Some women never spoke about it, still feeling the shame for years to come, others found solace in revealing their experiences to families and loved ones at a later point. Can you remember a similar story or incident among your own family or close friends?
12. *My Mother's Shadow* has elicited much attention around the world. In addition to England and America, the book is being published in ten other countries, from Israel to Holland, Russia to Italy. Which themes do you think are universal, applying to all cultures and belief systems?

About the author

Nikola Scott was born and raised in Germany and studied at university there. Having been obsessed with books from a young age, Nikola moved to New York City after her Master's degree to begin her first job in book publishing — a career in which she could fully indulge her love of fiction. She spent ten years working in

publishing in New York and then in London, editing other people's books, before she decided to take the leap into becoming a full-time writer herself. She now lives in Frankfurt with her husband and two sons. Her internationally bestselling debut novel, *My Mother's Shadow*, was published to great reviews in 2017, the Top Twenty Kindle Bestseller *Summer of Secrets* in 2018 and Nikola is currently working on her third book, due out in 2021.

You can visit Nikola's website www.nikolascott.com for more information or find her on Twitter (@nikola_scott), Instagram and Facebook (both @NikolaScottAuthor).

