



Reading Group Guide
Sandra Brown
Rainwater

INTRODUCTION

Ella Barron runs her Texas boardinghouse with an efficiency that ensures her life will be kept in perfect balance. When a new boarder moves in—the soft-spoken, insightful Mr. Rainwater—that careful balance is upset in ways that Ella could never have predicted. Faced with the challenges of rearing her autistic son alone and surviving the hardships imposed by economic crisis, the last thing Ella needs is an additional burden. But from Mr. Rainwater she learns a bittersweet truth—that love is worth whatever price one must pay for it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What qualities does Ella Brown possess? What is her greatest strength? What is her greatest weakness? Which qualities are inherent and which do you attribute to her situation in life?
2. *Rainwater* is set in Depression-era Texas. What details does Brown use to create atmosphere? How does the setting affect the action of the story?
3. It's clear from the beginning that Ella wants to prevent Solly's odd behavior from being misunderstood and ridiculed, and to avoid a situation which would result in his being taken away from her and institutionalized. Why does Ella reject the advice of Dr. Kincaid and Mr. Rainwater? Is maternal love impeding her from making a decision.
4. Mr. Rainwater is an outsider, which automatically makes him an object of speculation and curiosity. Why does he want to keep his illness and his affluence a secret? What clues to both did you find? Did you have any unanswered questions about him?
5. The small-town grapevine plays a dramatic role in the story. Discuss the ways in which it was beneficial, and ways in which the effects of gossip were damaging. Would the story have unfolded differently had it been set in a larger city? How so?



6. The financial strain of the era influences the actions of the characters. How does Brown portray the dire straits of the poor? Did the kindness and charity of Ella, Margaret, and others surprise you?
7. The showdown between Conrad Ellis's gang and the hungry mob is a pivotal scene. The actions and dialog of each character reveal much about that character. What is each party trying to protect or gain? Who is right and who is wrong?
8. Discuss how the relationship between Ella and Rainwater evolves from that of landlady and boarder into a loving one. How would you describe their relationship? Both of these characters are coping with a personal calamity—how does that influence their behavior toward each other? Would they have fallen in love had their circumstances not been as bleak?
9. What different kinds of prejudices did you find in the story and how were they expressed? Are there commonalities between the oppressed groups?
10. Describe the black community's affection for Brother Calvin. What does he represent to them? Why is he so highly admired by people of both races?
11. Is Brother Calvin a hero? Is he a martyr? Are the qualities of a Depression-era hero different from a modern hero?
12. At the end of the novel, why does Mr. Rainwater take responsibility for Solly's actions? Was he protecting Solly or punishing himself? Did his health or love for Ella factor into the decision? Is he a hero?
13. The novel is framed as a flashback. Did this add to the suspense?
14. Except for the prologue and epilogue, every scene is told from Ella's point of view. Did you realize this as you were reading it? Did Brown do this intentionally? Why?
15. Do you see any parallels between the financial hardships then and those facing our nation now? How are they similar and how do they differ? In general, do people respond to differently now to setbacks than people who lived through the Great Depression did?



ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Explore the work of John Steinbeck—a novelist who won a Pulitzer Prize for his portrayal of the Dust Bowl, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Visit the website of the National Steinbeck Center:

<http://www.Steinbeck.org> <http://www.Steinbeck.org>

2. In *Rainwater*, Sandra Brown describes the delicious Southern meals cooked by Ella Barron. Create your own inspired feast by searching “Southern Recipes” on

<http://www.foodnetwork.com>.

Try “Hattie’s Fried Chicken”

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/throwdown-with-bobby-flay/hatties-southern-fried-chicken-recipe/index.html>

with “Traditional Biscuits” on

<http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/emeril-lagasse/traditional-southern-biscuits-recipe2/index.html>

3. Learn more about Sandra Brown on her website: <http://www.sandrabrown.net/>