



# READING GUIDE

## DISCUSSION POINTS:

1. The story follows several sets of mothers and daughters: Connie and Grace, Grace and Sophia, Deliverance and Mercy, Mercy and Prudence. Each of these women have different points of view, and they often have trouble communicating across the generations. Why do these pairs, who seem so similar, have so much difficulty talking to each other? Do you identify with one of these characters more than the others? If so, why?
2. Many of the characters in the book, like Manning Chilton and Prudence Bartlett, are heavily constrained by their social class. Which character has the fewest choices because of his or her social position? Which character has the most choices? Do the twentieth-century characters have more freedom than the seventeenth and eighteenth century characters, or less?
3. Most of the main characters in *The Lost Book of Salem* are women. How have women's roles changed from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century? What about their obligations? Their opportunities?
4. Connie is a historian, who likes to interpret the past in light of the present. Sam, however, is a preservationist: he likes to maintain what still exists from the past, at the expense of the present. Are you more of a historian, or a preservationist? Do you see a difference between Connie's and Sam's feeling about the past? Just as the past may influence the present, can our present influence the past? How is the idea of a dialogue existing between the past and the present explored in *The Lost Book of Salem*?
5. How do some of the buildings, like Saltonstall Court, the Harvard Faculty Club, and the Milk Street house, function as *de facto* characters in the story?
6. Arlo seems only to show up when something unusual is about to happen. Does Arlo exist? Is his existence exclusively in relationship to Connie, or does he exist on his own terms? What does Arlo imply about relationships in general?
7. What role does religion play in *The Lost Book of Salem*? Is Christianity contradictory or complementary to magic in this story? Is Wicca more like magic, more like Christianity, or is it something else entirely?

8. Do you think magic, as represented in this book, exists in the real world? If so, how do you think it manifests itself?
9. Before the Scientific Revolution, alchemists reasoned by analogy, instead of by deduction. They saw a symbolic relationship between the heavens, the earth, the elements, and the human body. Can you think of any examples of people continuing to reason by analogy today?
10. *The Lost Book of Salem* seems to hold a contradictory position towards ambition and achievement. Some characters, like Connie, have their ambition rewarded, but others, like Manning Chilton, are thwarted. Is ambition a virtue, or a vice?
11. *The Lost Book of Salem* is the latest entry in a long bibliography of writing about witchcraft at Salem. Why do you think we are still so enthralled by this moment in history? What does Salem have to teach us about our culture today?
12. Historians differ on what precisely caused the Salem witch panic to grow so disproportionately relative to other colonial-era witch trials. Some blame infighting between a rural town and its bustling seaport; some point to the violence of the Indian wars along the Maine frontier; some even blame the hallucinatory effects of moldy rye. What do you think was the ultimate cause of the Salem panic?
13. Connie suggests at the beginning of the book that witchcraft held an important role in the New England colonies as both an explanation for things not yet elucidated by science and as a scapegoat. What does she mean by a scapegoat? Can you identify a modern equivalent of this theory? Do modern day witch hunts exist?
14. Deliverance has a chance to escape with her daughter the night before she is set to be put to death. Why does she make the choice that she makes?
15. Near the end of the story, we learn that having the talent for witchcraft comes at a pretty steep price. Would you like to be a witch, as represented in *The Lost Book of Salem*? Why or why not?
16. If Connie has a daughter some day, what do you think her name will be?





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Salem witch trials were a tragic and complicated chapter in American history. Katherine Howe did plenty of research to make *The Lost Book of Salem* so rich with historical detail. These are just some of the books that inspired her.

- *Behind the Crystal Ball* by Anthony Aveni
- *Salem Possessed* by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum
- *Salem-Village Witchcraft* by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum
- *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* by Owen Davies
- *Entertaining Satan* by John Demos
- *Women Before the Bar* by Cornelia Hughes Dayton
- *Witchcraft, Magic, and Alchemy* by Grillot de Givry
- *Devil in the Shape of a Woman* by Carol Karlsen
- *In the Devil's Snare* by Mary Beth Norton
- *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas
- *A Midwife's Tale* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich
- *New England Begins: The Seventeenth Century*, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- <http://etext.virginia.edu/salem/witchcraft>, University of Virginia's online archive of Salem witchcraft papers