



The Book Club Play by Karen Zacarias

Educational Guide

Villanova Theatre 2018

The Summary

Ana Smith has agreed to have her book club meetings filmed as part of an international documentary. She is going to allow a camera to film the entirety of the meetings she has with her husband and friends as they discuss some of their favorite books in hopes of learning more about each other and, more importantly, themselves. Just a group of friends talking about books and life. What could go wrong? Turns out everything! People discover themselves, reveal their attraction to others, and go through mental breakdowns . . . all for the entire world to see.

The Characters:

The Book Club Members:

ANA SMITH - Leader of the Book Club. Controlling and domineering, it was Ana's idea to agree to put the Book Club on camera. She is a writer who has her own column and takes great pride in her work and place in the world.

ROB SMITH - Devoted husband of Ana, Will's laid-back attitude fits perfectly within Ana's plan for the group. But his desire to be taken more seriously may lead to conflict.

WILL NOTHANGEL- Close friend of Ana and Will. He has known them since they were all in college together. He believes Book Club was both his and Ana's idea. And he's still waiting to get credit for that.

JEN MCCLINTOCK - Best friend of Will. As of late, she has been reclusive due to her PTSD from a public political/sexual scandal. Book Club is her chance to get back to living again. As someone who feels "books are her best friends," Jen's connection to the Book Club may be stronger than anyone else's.

LILY JACKSON - Youngest member of the group. A co-worker of Ana, she is both a writer and an African-American (which is not just a descriptor, but an actual factor in the story). One could make the case she represents the wave of readers and writers Ana is looking to nourish and culture.

ALEX - Newest member of the group. A professor of comparative literature, Alex brings a lot to the group. It just may not be a lot of what some people may be expecting. Some members find him threatening while other feel he's a breath of fresh air. Will Alex be the end of Book Club or is he just what the group needs to take them to the next level.

The Pundits:

ELISA JONES-EISENBLITZ - A light-hearted literary agent who has great respect for writers and their importance to the world. She understands the importance of story.

FRANK - Secret Service Agent with security and abandonment issues. Believes in trusting the system and never straying from the course.

SAM W. THOMPSON - Wal-Mart stock manager from Texas. Encourages classic literature but does not provide it.

CARL BANKS- Prison inmate. Understands the power of information distribution in a way most never will.

MRS. EDITH P. SIMPSON - An old but active retired librarian, Edith Simpson believes in "living what you read." Whatever that means.

The Playwright:

Karan Zacarias. Born in Mexico, Zacarias attended Stanford as an undergrad before receiving her master's degree at Boston University. She is currently the resident playwright at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Zacarias is the founder of Latinx Theatre Commons whose mission is "a commons-based approach to transform the narrative of the American theatre, to amplify the visibility of Latina/o/x performance making." Using her art as way to support herself "without betraying others," Zacarias especially enjoys writing for young people of which she says, " – it is a rewarding, hilarious and heartbreaking endeavor."

Things to Consider

1. Why do you think people behave differently in front of the camera? Why do you think people agree to having their lives filmed?
2. The playwright suggests ways to double (having the same actors playing the book club members also play the pundits). Would it bother you to see the same actor playing different characters?
3. Why do you think people join book clubs? Would you join one if you were invited? Why or why not?
4. Karen Zacarias makes it mandatory in her script that Lily must be an African-American while the other members of the Book Club (Ana, Jen, Rob, and Will) can be any race except other than African-American. Why do think this is? Do you think the race of the characters is that important to the story?