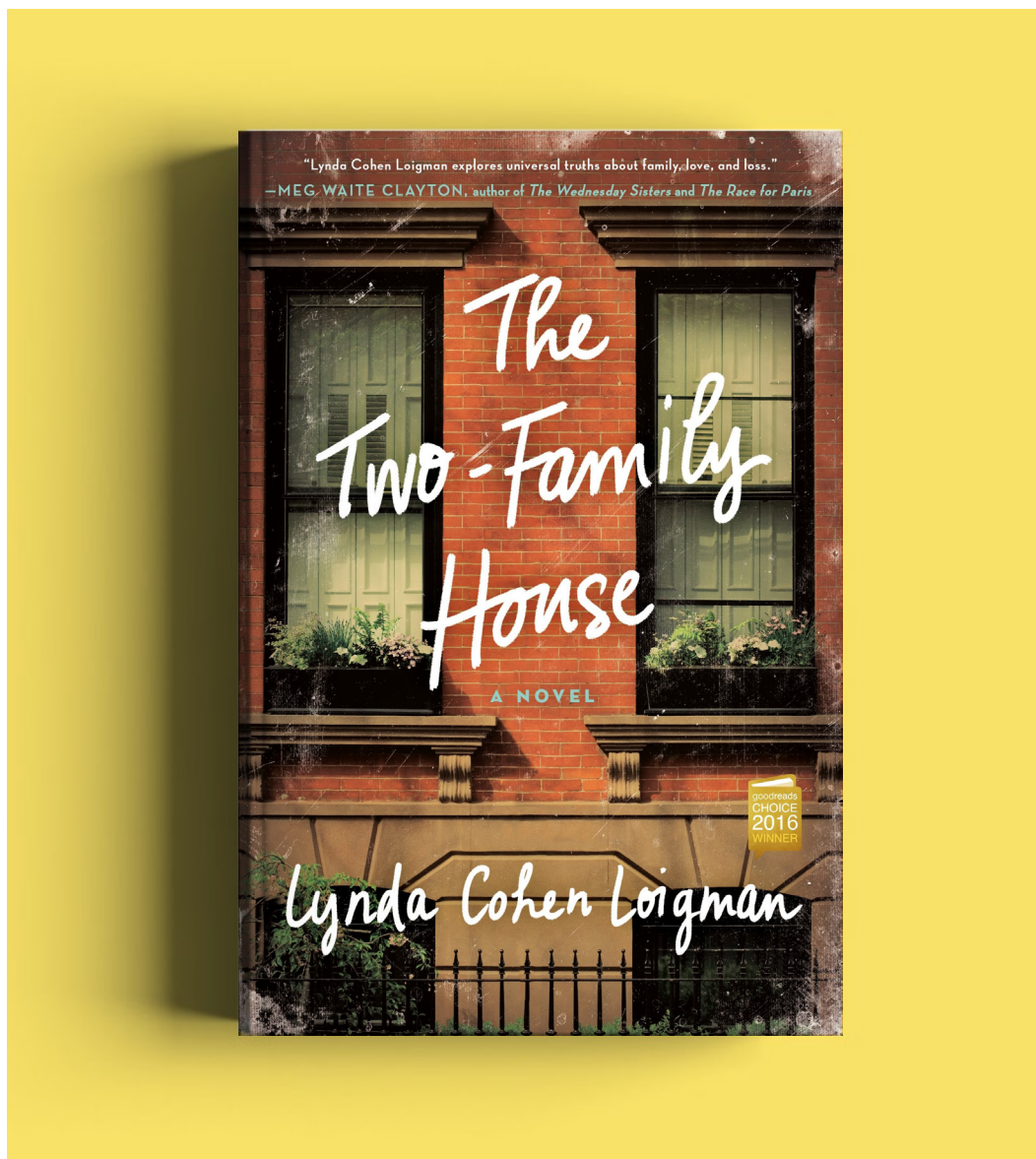


JBC Book Clubs Discussion Guide

Created in partnership with St. Martin's
Press



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A Story of King Solomon

King Solomon was renowned for his wisdom. One of his most famous decisions involved switched babies and a question of parentage. mother.”

Two women appeared before him, in need of a ruling to settle a dispute. The first woman stated their case: “Please, my lord! This woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. One the third day after I was delivered, this woman also gave birth to a child. We were alone; there was no one else with us in the house, just the two of us in the house. During the night, this woman’s child died because she lay on it. She arose in the night and took my son from my side while [I] was asleep, and laid him in her bosom; and she laid her dead son in my bosom. When I arose in the morning to nurse my son, there he was, dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, it was not the son that I had borne.” (Kings 1 3:17-21, *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*, 1999)

The other woman protested, “No, the live one is my son, and the dead one is yours!” They argued back and forth, until King Solomon interrupted. Since both women claimed the child as theirs, the king requested a sword with which to cut the live child in half and give half to each woman.

The first woman was overcome with compassion for her son and pleaded, “Please, my lord, give her the live child; only don’t kill him!”; the other woman said, “It shall be neither yours nor mine; cut it in two!” (3:26).

The king issued his ruling. “Give the live child to [the first woman], and do not put it to death; she is its

JBC Book Clubs Discussion Questions

These questions were created by JBC Book Clubs as a supplement to the St. Martin's Press reading group guide. Note: the questions below do contain spoilers!

1. How does the King Solomon story apply to *The Two-Family House*? How do you think the story would have changed had Teddy not died? Is Rose in any way like the second woman?
2. In which ways do Rose and Helen represent a classic Jewish mother stereotype?
3. In an interview with the publisher, author Lynda Cohen Loigman says that she feels the house on Christopher Street is almost another character in the book. How do you think the physical proximity of the two families impacts their interactions? Do you think that their eventual moves to separate houses is helpful or harmful to their ongoing relationships?
4. Think about the Jewish concept of *bashert* (meant to be). Do you think the events of the novel were *bashert*? After Helen tells Natalie the truth about Natalie and Teddy, Natalie dismisses Helen's concern that she could have prevented Teddy's death, "It wouldn't have mattered which house Teddy lived in, he would have bent down for his comic just the same" (p. 287). Do you agree?
5. After the babies are born, do you think Rose's decline is a result of post-partum depression or a reaction to Rose and Helen's secret? Why is her reaction to ignore Natalie and resent her?
6. Why do you think Natalie tells Helen, "You couldn't have saved [Teddy], but you did save me" (p. 287). From what was Natalie saved? Aside from Teddy, is there anyone in the novel who is not "saved" or redeemed in some way?
7. Why do you think that Judith and Natalie are the only children who get a voice in the novel?
8. After Rose's argument with Mort about allowing Judith to go to Radcliffe, she goes to Teddy's room and fragments of the Mourner's Kaddish and the Unetaneh Tokef prayer come to her (p. 208). Why do you think those are the prayers that come to her? Why then?
9. What role do Jewish rituals and traditions play in the novel? Are there times when they affect the plot or characters directly? Of the life-cycle events that take place throughout the course of the story, in what ways do Jewish practices highlight an aspect of the novel?

Recipe:

Pumpkin Chocolate Chip

Adaped from [Epicurious](#)

Helen's pumpkin bread is a Thanksgiving staple that Judith misses when Mort and Rose's family goes to Rose's Aunt Faye (p. 87). Try this version which adds an extra treat of chocolate chips.

Ingredients

1 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 cup white whole wheat flour
1 1/2 tsp pumpkin pie spice
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
3/4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup unsalted butter or margarine, softened
1 1/4 cups sugar
3 large eggs
1 cup canned pumpkin
1 tsp. vanilla
1/3 cup whole milk or almond milk
1 cup dark or semi-sweet chocolate chips
3/4 cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350° F, and grease a loaf pan.

In a small bowl, sift the dry ingredients (first six ingredients).

Using an electric mixer, beat the butter or margarine until smooth, then gradually add in sugar. Beat eggs in one at a time, then the pumpkin and vanilla.

Mix dry ingredients in alternately with milk.

Add in the chocolate chips (and nuts if using).

Bake for about 55 minutes, until a tester in the center comes out clean. Cool for 15 minutes before turning cake out onto a rack to cool completely.

Wrap cake in plastic to store; it can last up to 2 days at room tempertaure.

Recipe: Apple Pie

Apple pie is another family favorite, one that Helen often makes for Judith (p. 161) and that Judith and Mort later bond over at the coffee shop (p. 205).

Ingredients

Pie dough (store bought or see recipe below)

1/2 cup sugar

2 Tbl all-purpose flour

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1/8 tsp ground nutmeg

ff tsp salt

4 lbs apples (approx. 8-10), thinly sliced

1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice

2 tbsp. butter, cut into small pieces

Pie Dough Ingredients

2.5 cups of flour

2 tbsp. sugar

1 tsp. table salt

1 cup unsalted butter, very cold

1/4 -1/2 cup ice water

1. If making the pie dough, combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Dice the butter, and add it into the bowl. Using a pastry blender, cut the butter into the flour mixture until the butter is the size of small peas. Pour 1/4 cup of ice water into the mixture, and gather the dough with a rubber spatula. Continue adding the remaining 1/4 cup of water a tablespoon at a time until the dough forms a large clump. Gently knead the clump into a ball, divide it into two balls, then flatten each ball into disk. Wrap the disks in plastic and chill in the refrigerator for 1-2 hours.

2. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F.

3. In a large bowl, combine the apples, lemon juice, flour, sugar, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg and toss until the apples are evenly coated.

4. Roll out one of the dough balls to a 12-inch circle, and line a 9-inch pie plate with it. Trim any extra dough to 1/2 an inch from the edge of the pie plate.

5. Pour the apples into the pastry-lined pie plate, then dot with butter.

6. Roll out the second disk of dough, and cover the pie. Press along the rim to seal, then trim overhang to one inch. Cut a few slits in the top dough.

7. Fold the overhang under, and crimp as desired.

8. Bake for 40-50 minutes until crust is brown and juice begins to bubble. If the edges are browning too quickly, cover them with aluminum foil.

Recipe:

Pot Roast with Mushroom Gravy

Adapted from Claire Robinson, *The Food Network*

Ingredients

1 (4-5 lbs) boneless beef bottom round roast or chuck roast

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Olive oil

2 carrots, chopped

1 clove of garlic, minced

1 lb. cremini mushrooms, quartered

2 onions, halved and sliced

3 1/2 cups of low sodium beef broth

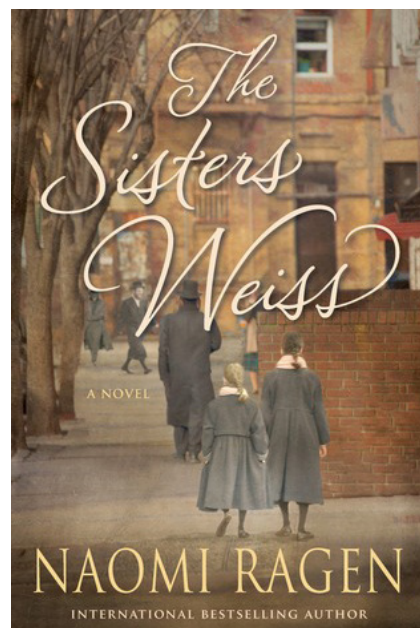
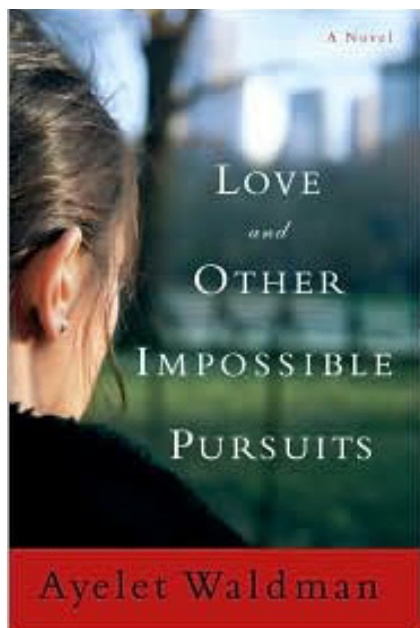
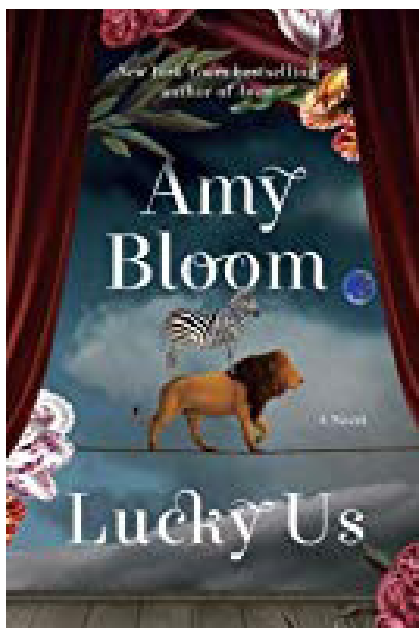
1/2 cup of red wine (or more beef broth)

1 tsp ground thyme

If your book club meets for dinner, you can feast on the meal that Abe looks forward to the whole time that he's in the hospital (p. 260). Add in dinner rolls and pecan pie for the full menu.

1. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F.
2. Pat the roast dry and season it liberally on all sides with salt and pepper.
3. Heat oil in a dutch oven and brown the meat (about 4 minutes on each side).
4. Remove the meat, and add the mushrooms into the pot. Season mushrooms with salt and pepper, and cook until browned and beginning to release liquid.
5. Add the onions, garlic, and carrots and stir to combine. Place the meat (with any additional juices that have accumulated) on top of the vegetables.
6. Pour the broth and wine over the meat. Bring to a simmer, then cover and place in the oven to roast for 2 1/2 hours. Uncover and roast for an additional 30 minutes.
7. Remove meat from the pot, and skim off and discard the excess fat.
8. Ladle approximately 1 1/2 cups of vegetables and cooking liquid into a blender or food processor and puree. Pour the puree back into the pot and stir to combine with remaining vegetables and liquid to form a gravy.
9. Slice the pot roast and drizzle some of the gravy over it. Serve remaining gravy on the side.

Recommended Reads



Articles on Babies Switched at Birth

New York Times: [The Mixed-Up Brothers of Bogotá](#)

New York Daily News: [Kimberly Mays, who was switched at birth, talks about her extraordinary upbringing](#)

Huffington Post: [After Being Switched At Birth, Rebecca Chittum And Callie Johnson Wouldn't Change A Thing](#)

JBC Book Clubs, a program of Jewish Book Council, provides resources and support for book clubs interested in reading books of Jewish interest. On the Jewish Book Council website, find thousands of book reviews, discussion questions and discussion guides, thematic reading lists, and more. JBC Book Clubs is a one-stop shop to build and enhance your book club's conversations—let us guide you on your literary journey.

Jewish Book Council, with roots dating back to 1925, is the only nonprofit dedicated to the promotion of Jewish-interest literature. For nearly 70 years, we have supported and celebrated Jewish authors and books, and used literature to bring people together for meaningful discussions around Jewish life, identity, and culture.

Visit us at www.jewishbookcouncil.org

