

A WOMAN OF INTELLIGENCE

Discussion Guide

1. Consider the opening scene of the novel. What does it reveal about Katharina's feelings toward motherhood and her daily existence? How does it set the tone for the unfolding narrative?
2. Discuss the moment when Tom says he doesn't want to marry someone like his mother, Amelia Edgeworth. What does this reveal about Tom and Rina's relationship? What does it reveal about Tom's relationship with Amelia? How did your feelings toward Amelia evolve over the course of the novel?
3. On page 38, Rina says, "But I'm still a woman in 1946." Consider the weight of this statement. What did you learn about the societal expectations for women during the 1940s and 1950s?
4. What did you make of the novel's title?
5. The novel's setting of New York City is so integral to the narrative, serving as a character in and of itself. What are some moments in the novel when you see this to be true?
6. Discuss the significance of the hallway in Rina and Tom's apartment ("the gallery") and the window seat. What does this spot represent for Rina?
7. Discuss the evolution of Rina and Tom's relationship over the years, from the beginning of their relationship to their marriage. What do you think the future holds for the two of them?
8. Examine the female friendships that Rina has in her life. How do Faye Buckley Swan, Ava Newman, and Marianne Fontaine influence Rina?
9. What did the novel teach you about the Red Scare and McCarthyism that you may not have known before?
10. On page 346, Turner Wells says to Rina, "Don't let your circumstances extinguish you." Discuss the impact and meaning behind his words. In what ways have the characters in the novel—and Rina in particular—been affected by and/or overcome their circumstances?
11. Consider the role of Turner Wells in Rina's life. What does he mean to her? How does he change her? Did the racism regarding interracial couples in the 1950s impact them and their interactions?
12. Do you think our views on the roles of motherhood, a mother's identity, and postpartum depression have changed since the 1950s?
13. Discuss the end of the novel. How did it make you feel? What do you think comes next for Rina?