

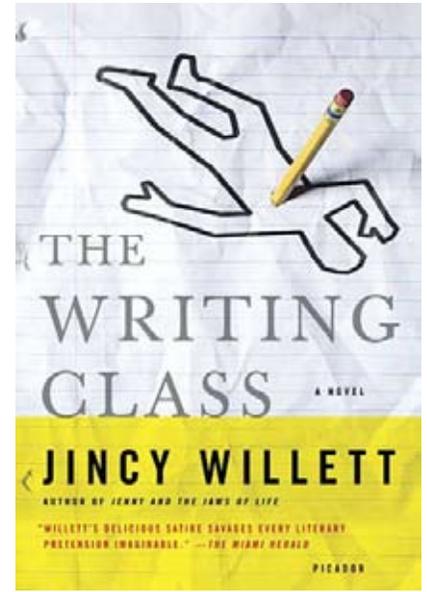


Reading Group Gold

The Writing Class

A Novel

by Jincy Willett



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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Writing Class* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Writing Class*.

About the Book

Amy Gallup is gifted, perhaps too gifted for her own good. Published at only twenty-two, she peaked early and found critical but not commercial success. Now her former life is gone, along with her writing career and beloved husband. A reclusive widow, her sole companion a dour, flatulent basset hound who barely tolerates her, her daily mantra Kill Me Now, she is a loner afraid to be alone. Her only bright spot each week is *The Writing Class* that she teaches at the university extension.

This semester's class is full of the usual suspects: the doctor who wants to be the next Robin Cook, the overly enthusiastic repeat student, the slacker, the unassuming student with the hidden talent, the prankster, the know-it-all.... Amy's seen them all before. But something is very different about this class--and the clues begin with a scary phone call in the middle of the night and obscene threats instead of peer evaluations on student writing assignments. Amy soon realizes that one of her students is a very sick puppy, and when a member of the class is murdered, everyone becomes a suspect. As she dissects each student's writing for clues, Amy must enlist the help of everyone in her class, including the murderer, to find the killer among them.

Suspenseful, extremely witty, brilliantly written, unexpectedly hilarious, and a joy from start to finish, *The Writing Class* is a one-of-a-kind novel that rivals Jincy Willett's previous masterpieces.

About the Author

Jincy Willett is a writer and editor based in San Diego, CA. Her short stories have appeared in *Playgirl*, *The Yale Review*, and the *Massachusetts Review*.



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Discussion Questions

Warning: This guide contains key plot points and spoilers. Enter at your own risk.

1. This novel incorporates many voices—student writing, the Sniper’s notes, emails, traditional narration—to tell its story. Why do you think the author chose to reproduce the actual documents, rather than just describing them? What is the effect on the story?
2. What motivated Edna to torment and murder her classmates? Were there any clues in her fiction that she had the capacity to be a killer?
3. Is Amy a good teacher? How does her private life contribute to the way she teaches her class?
4. What compels the students to keep attending class, even when they know the Sniper is among them? Does their interest in writing and storytelling have anything to do with it?
5. How do you interpret the novel’s last lines? What is Amy thanking them for, and why do you think the author ends the story on this note?
6. How would you describe Amy and Carla’s relationship? Are they friends? What does each get from the other?
7. How does Amy cope with the presence of the Sniper? As the Sniper became more menacing, did she react differently to the threat than you would have?
8. Were you surprised to learn who the Sniper was? Who did you suspect early on?
9. Look at the passage on pages 129–31 about the disembodied hands. Why do you think the author includes this, as well as the passages about Amy’s fear of tarantulas? What can these fears tell us about Amy’s mind as an adult? What larger fears do you think they might be connected to?
10. “In the years after [Amy] stopped pretending to write, she had begun, she now realized, to deal with actual people as though they were puny fictional replicas” (page 69). What does the author mean by this? How does this behavior change over the course of the novel? Do you know anyone who has a similar tendency?
11. Though some of the students want to be writers, many of them take the class for other reasons as well. What do we learn over the course of the novel about the connection between various students’ private lives and their roles in the class?
12. What does this novel have to say about what it takes to write fiction, and about fiction writers as people? Are there lessons in Amy’s class that you think could be applied to writing in the real world?