

# READING GROUP GUIDE

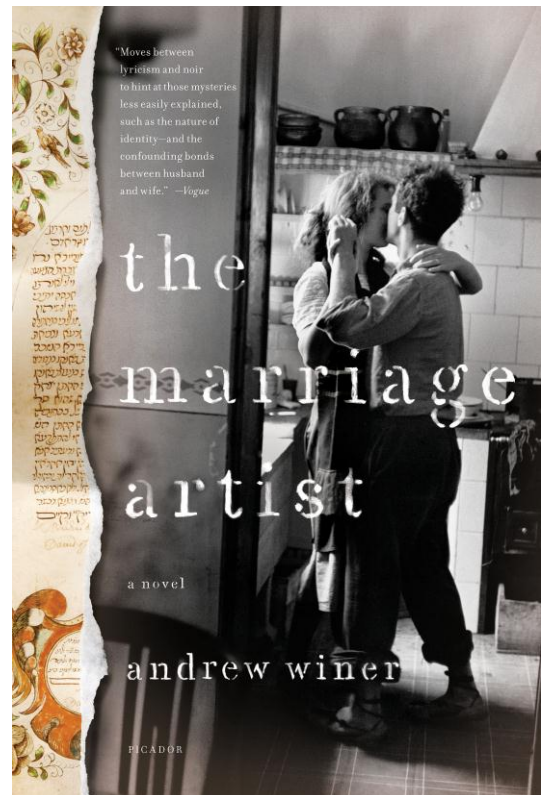
## *The Marriage Artist*

*A Novel*

by Andrew Winer

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Marriage Artist* 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 Marriage Artist*.

### About the Book

When the wife of renowned art critic Daniel Lichtmann plunges to her death, she is not alone. Lying next to her is Benjamin Wind, the very artist Daniel most championed. Dedicating himself to uncovering the secrets of their relationship, Daniel discovers a web of mysteries leading back to pre--World War II Vienna. Ambitious, haunting, and stunningly written, *The Marriage Artist* is an “elaborate psycho-political-sexual puzzle, with...hard truths, startling visions, and eerie insights into the mystical and memorializing powers of art, and that endless hunger we call love” (*Booklist*).

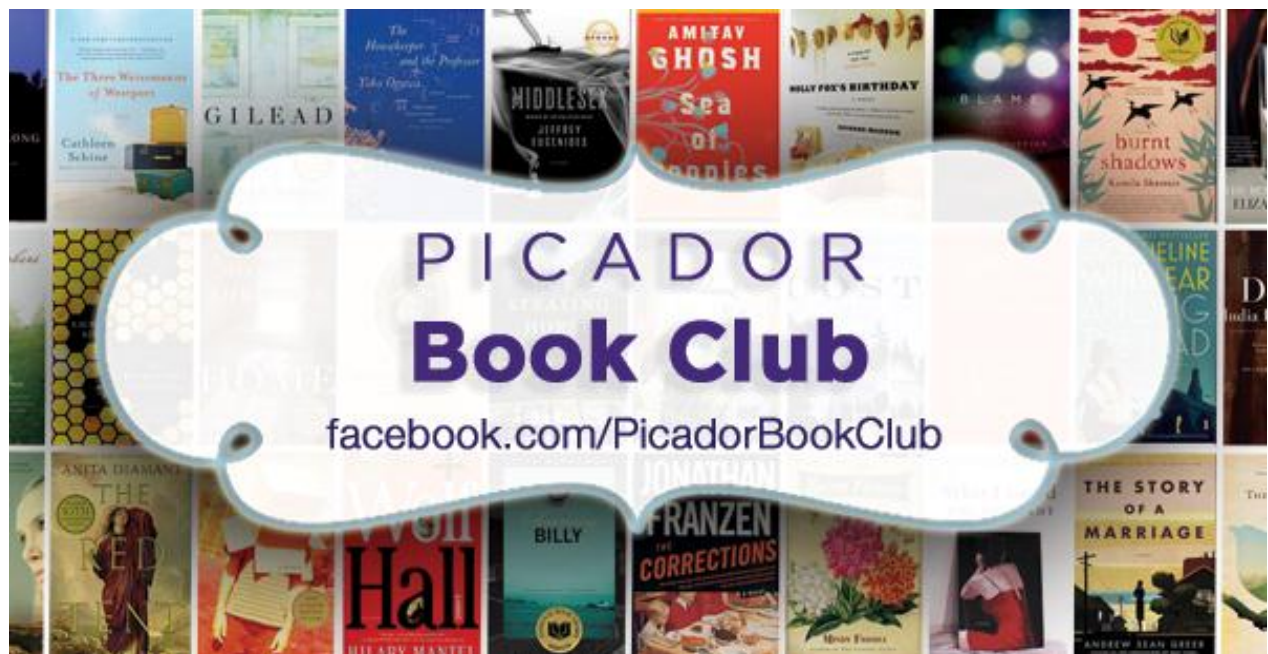
## About the Author

**Andrew Winer** is the author of *The Marriage Artist* and *The Color Midnight Made*. Formerly an artist who wrote art criticism, he teaches at the University of California, Riverside, where he has directed the MFA program in creative writing. He is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Fiction and is married to the writer Charmaine Craig, with whom he has two daughters.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is Daniel and Aleksandra's marriage doomed from the beginning? Why can't they make it work?
2. What is the ultimate purpose of the ketubah? What are some of the motives behind the various couples' intent to have one made by Josef?
3. Daniel's first wife is given no name, and is characterized as being nearly the perfect opposite of Aleksandra. Carmen, by contrast, is not compared to either. What draws Daniel to each of the women?
4. How is Frau Pick's outlook on life transformed by her unhappy marriage? What about Daniel's? And Hannah's (before her eventual reconciliation with Josef)?
5. Why are Grandfather Pommeranz and Frau and Herr Pick unable to acknowledge Josef's achievement right after his first ketubah is revealed? Why is Herr Pick never able to make peace with his son's art, both Jewish and modern?
6. Why does Josef start creating modern art, especially with the subject matter of nude figures and sexuality?
7. What causes Aleksandra to behave in such a conflicted manner at Benjamin's show— by first prostrating herself before one of the works, then saying publicly that the show is just "all right"? Does she wish to send a message to Daniel afterward, during that pivotal walk to Central Park, or is she simply absorbed in her own emotional turmoil?
8. Do you agree with Daniel's mother's assessment of Aleksandra's death, that she killed herself out of guilt? What about her belief that the only thing that brings joy to people is "beginning"?
9. What compels Daniel to attend Benjamin's memorial service? And to go on the spontaneous trip with Max to Vienna?
10. Grandfather Pommeranz tells Josef: "Only an image can fill us with pure joy." How does this statement affect Josef? How is this different from or similar to Daniel's mother's view that only beginnings bring joy?
11. What causes Josef's antagonistic relationship to love and marriage: his own parents' unhappiness, or his strange career as a marriage artist?

12. How is Hannah's requirement that love come through "absolute affliction" perfected with her relationship with Josef? How is she able to feel such complete devotion to him before they even speak a word to each other?
13. How is Hannah's view of Josef like her view of God? How does Josef echo her beliefs in his speech to the Gestapo officers and Hannah when he says, "Lovers are like worshippers. . . Don't make me complete my picture of you. I still want to worship you" (page 247)?
14. How does the intense episode of the Gestapo officers assaulting Josef, Hannah, and Herman parallel the questioning of Daniel, Carmen, and Max by the synagogue authorities in Vienna?
15. What bothers Daniel most about Herman? Do the two men have any similarities?
16. How do Hannah's words to Herman on that train to the camp—"Walk away from it all"—become prophetic for his life? Does Hannah do the right thing by trying to make a family with Max? Should they have told Herman the truth about Josef as soon as possible?
17. What is the ultimate meaning of Benjamin's last show? Is it, in fact, hopeful? How does Daniel's revelation about the origins of the human figures change the meaning he attributed to it in his infamous review ("gave shape to the world's suffering")? In what way does Benjamin's show fulfill a purpose that the actual graveyard in Vienna neglects to do?



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