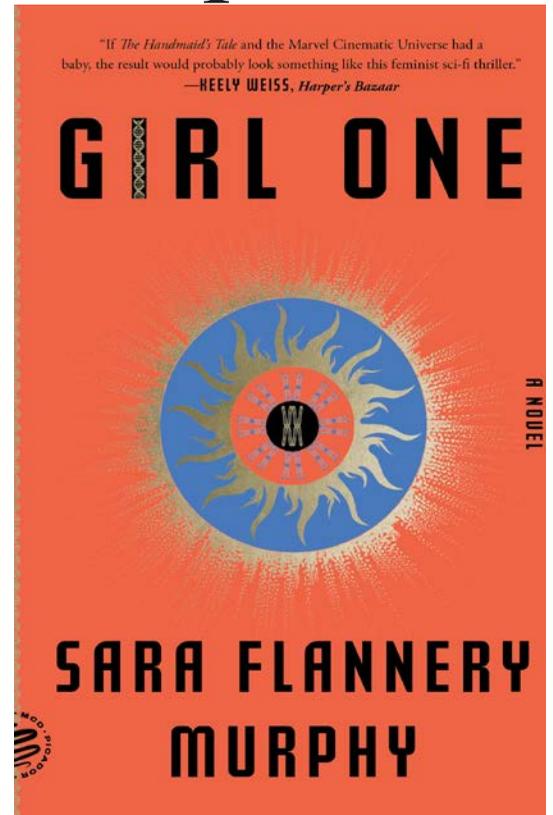


FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Reading Group Gold

Girl One

by Sara Flannery Murphy



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Josephine Morrow is Girl One, the first of nine Miracle Babies conceived without male DNA on an experimental commune known as the Homestead. The Girls were raised in the shadow of controversy—plagued by zealots calling them aberrations and their mothers demons—until a devastating fire at the Homestead claimed the lives of three people, leaving the survivors to scatter across the United States.

Years later, Josie learns that her mother has gone missing and sets off on a desperate road trip, tracking down the only people who might help: her estranged sisters. Soon she joins forces with two of the other Girls, and they journey back through their past, uncovering secrets about their origins and unlocking devastating abilities they never knew they had.

With *Girl One*, Sara Flannery Murphy delivers a rousing tale of love, ambition, power, and the extraordinary bonds of sisterhood.

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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many reviewers called *Girl One* “genre-defying.” Which genre or genres do you see in the book?
2. Throughout *Girl One*, Josie pieces together an image of her mother, and ultimately of Dr. Bellanger, that she doesn’t recognize. Have you ever had a revelation about a family member or a loved one that you’ve had to reconcile with your beliefs about that person? As the book progresses, what secrets does Josie uncover? Do they surprise you?
3. Discuss the possibility of women procreating without men (and, in this case, without the science of IVF therapy). Does this opportunity liberate women or hinder them? Regardless of gender, discuss what role science plays in human procreation, and whether you think it helps our growth as a society or hurts us
4. Dr. Bellanger selected the name “the Homestead” as a reference to traditional family ties—the ones his experiment and its results aimed to sever. How do you define “home” in your own life? What does family—the traditional nuclear family or otherwise—look like to you?
5. In Chapter 10, Josie says, “It might sound strange for a Girl without a father, but I take after Bellanger more than I’ll ever take after my mother” (page 59). Discuss what Josie means by this. In what ways does she take after Dr. Bellanger? In an earlier passage, she shares that her mother disapproved of her pursuing biology and research. What do you think about her decision to follow in Dr. Bellanger’s footsteps? Discuss this in the context of the nature-versus-nurture debate. In what ways does nature determine our personalities or our demeanor? In what ways does nurture step in?
6. Think about the names used in this book. Consider whether there is meaning behind the names of Dr. Joseph Bellanger or Margaret Morrow, or the others in the book. What do you think about Josie being named after Dr. Bellanger?
7. On page 114, Cate says, “At its best, what Bellanger accomplished was supposed to be giving women choice and control.” Do you think Dr. Bellanger managed to achieve this? Do you think women in the novel’s world have a sense of autonomy and authority over their own lives?
8. Discuss this novel’s setting, in the context of the 1970s—*Roe v. Wade* in 1973 and the women’s liberation movement—then followed by the early 1990s, specifically 1994. In what ways does the novel speak to history? In what ways does it go beyond it?
9. Reporters, paparazzi, and gossip columnists haunt most of the characters in this book. Deb and Bonnie interact with the media in a controlled, “fluffy” way, whereas Margaret Morrow and the Bowers avoid them. Discuss the impact of the media on women in the 1990s, as well as how the media portrays women today. Do you think the author is making a commentary on the media and its relationship to the female experience? Why or why not? Liselle’s reaction to the window cleaner’s arrival—and her slowness in closing the door when the woman leaves. What does Liselle feel when the woman walks away? How do you think she will respond to Selena’s

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arrival? What do you think these two women represent to Liselle, or to the novel as a whole?

10. Discuss the powers that exist among the Girls and when their powers take form. What makes them weaker and what makes them more powerful? And how does their experience differ from Fiona's?
11. "A woman who's not part of the normal order doesn't respect the ties that bind. She takes what she wants" (page 190). Think about the different women in the book: Josie, training to become a medical researcher; Cate, a queer woman who helps other women in need; and all the Mothers who have children without men. How do their talents, both magical and tangible, threaten the status quo and the patriarchy?
12. Betrayal is a theme that repeats itself throughout the storyline. How do the different characters feel about their own actions, and how do they respond to others?
13. The novel closes with a letter. What do you think the author was trying to do with this voice from the past?
14. Girl One raises questions about story and truth. Whose story is this, and who has the right to tell it? Discuss the ways in which stories are portrayed in the novel in the context of a reporter's work, a doctor's, and above all as a part of family history.
15. Many of the women in this book are dismissed as "witches," "crazy," or "unwell." Reflect on the women in this novel, those with and without magical powers. Are these women crazy or are they simply powerful?

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ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. Read *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas, or *Vox* by Christina Dalcher as your next book. Then compare the ways these authors discuss women's rights, empowerment, and the patriarchy through their fiction. What are the similarities between the stories? What are the differences?
2. Before your group meets, watch some or all of Sara Flannery Murphy's book event with Left Bank Books on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/dUNyFOCDRbQ>.
3. Watch the movie *Mad Max: Fury Road* or another feminist-leaning film with women at the center of society. Discuss the ways in which the films and *Girl One* align or diverge.
4. In the acknowledgments, Murphy shares that she was inspired by *Making Sex* by Thomas Laqueur, *The Genius Factory* by David Plotz, *Utopian Motherhood* by Robert T. Francoeur, *My Life as the World's First Test-Tube Baby* by Louise Brown, and *Like a Virgin* by Aarathi Prasad. Read a few passages of these books and discuss where you think Murphy may have drawn her inspiration.
5. At one point in the novel, the theme of mansplaining comes up. Read Rebecca Solnit's propulsive essay "Men Explain Things to Me" and discuss the ways feminism has shifted over the last few decades. Is today's feminism so different from the feminism Margaret tried to achieve in the 1970s?

Discussion guide by Brianne Conklin-Sperber