

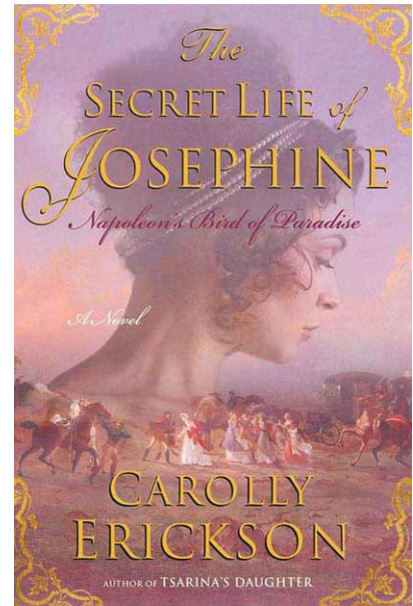
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## The Secret Life of Josephine

By Carolly Erickson

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Secret Life of Josephine* 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 Secret Life of Josephine*.

### About the Book

The bestselling author of *The Hidden Diary of Marie Antoinette* and *The Last Wife of Henry VIII* brings us an enchanting novel about one of the most seductive women in history: Josephine Bonaparte, first wife of Napoleon.

Born on the Caribbean island of Martinique, Josephine's exotic Creole appeal would ultimately propel her to reign over an empire as wife of the most powerful man in the world. But her life is a story of ambition and danger, of luck and a ferocious will to survive. Married young to an arrogant French aristocrat who died during the Terror, Josephine also narrowly missed losing her head to the guillotine. But her extraordinary charm, sensuality and natural cunning helped her become mistress to some of the most powerful politicians in post-Revolutionary France. Soon she had married the much younger General Bonaparte whose armies garnered France an empire that ran from Europe to Africa and the New World and who crowned himself and his wife Emperor and Empress of France. He dominated on the battlefield and she presided over the worlds of fashion and glamor. But Josephine's heart belonged to another man--the mysterious, compelling stranger who had won her as a girl in Martinique.



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## About the Author

Carolly Erickson is the bestselling author of many distinguished works of nonfiction and a series of Historical Entertainments, blending fact and invention. She lives in Hawaii.

## Discussion Questions

- 1.) What did you know about Josephine before reading this novel?
- 2.) How did Josephine's upbringing on Martinique influence her adult life? Was she ever truly a Frenchwoman?
- 3.) Do you think Josephine would have been happier if she had not married Napoleon? Or would her innate ambition have been thwarted?
- 4.) Do you think Josephine's encounters with the Carib chief Orgulon were hallucinations?
- 5.) What elements in the novel made Josephine real to you? How important was the author's use of first-person narrative?
- 6.) What strengths did Josephine possess that allowed her to survive the Revolution, imprisonment, an abusive marriage, the murderous hostility of her Corsican in-laws, and, finally, divorce?
- 7.) How did Carolly Erickson interweave fact and fiction in this historical novel? Did you find the blend captivating or frustrating?

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