



Book Club Book of the Month: October 2020

***The History of Mischief*, Rebecca Higgie (Fremantle Press)**

Summary

Following the death of their parents, feisty 9-year-old Jessie and her older sister Kay move to their grandmother's abandoned home in Guildford where they discover a book, *The History of Mischief*, hidden under the floor. Both an historical adventure and a mystery story, it is a book unlike any they have ever known which leads them to uncover all sorts of family secrets as they come to terms with their grief.

The History of Mischief won the 2019 Fogarty Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript and is an impressive debut novel. While marketed by publisher Fremantle Press in the Young Adult category, this clever novel will be enjoyed by readers of all ages and would be especially suitable for multi-generational book clubs. This is a difficult book to categorise and is described by the author as "magical literary historical fiction". It will also appeal to readers who enjoy mystery, adventure, fantasy and intergenerational stories.

About the author

Rebecca Higgie has spent her whole life spent in the company of books, with careers in libraries and universities. Formerly an academic at Curtin University and Brunel University London, she has published research on satire and politics. She has worked in the stacks of the State Library of Western Australia and fostered childhood literacy as the Library Officer at Guildford Primary, WA's oldest public school. Her creative work combines whimsy and play with extensive research and critical insights. Her stories and poems have appeared in publications such as *Westerly*, *Stories of Perth* and *Visible Ink*. She is currently the host of the Fremantle Press Podcast, where she interviews local Western Australian authors and industry experts on all things books and publishing. *The History of Mischief* took Rebecca over 12 years to write, as she researched and wrote between working, obtaining a PhD, and starting a family.

Questions for discussion

1. The intricately designed cover simultaneously entices the reader and issues a challenge - can you relate all the details on the cover to the stories within?
2. How would you define mischief? Is it always harmless? What do you consider was the worst mischief done in the book?
3. Many fascinating aspects of history are uncovered within the pages of this book. Which did you find most intriguing or surprising?
4. Some spectacular libraries are described in the book. What is your personal experience of libraries? What is the most memorable library you have visited and why?
5. The setting for this book is decidedly West Australian. Would it encourage you to explore the Guildford area and visit the landmarks mentioned in the text?

6. Discuss the importance of music and consider the various ways in which it is incorporated into the story.
7. Consider the depiction of librarians and library staff – how do they differ from the stereotypes often found in literature? Does this book reinforce or shatter the myth about the appearance, demeanour and personality of librarians?
8. The author takes the advice of Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl that it is best to get the parents conveniently out of the way at the start – how does this help the story?
9. Discuss the importance of secondary characters such as Theodore, Jessie’s school friend, and what they add to the narrative.
10. How are loss, grief and societal expectations of grieving explored in the novel? Compare and contrast how Jessie and Kay cope with their emotions. What helps the characters to deal with their grief?
11. How does the relationship between Jessie and Kay develop and change throughout the story?
12. Did you see the ending coming or were you taken by surprise?

If you liked this book, you may also like...

Catch a Falling Star, Meg McKinlay, Walker Books

Smart Ovens for Lonely People, Elizabeth Tan, Brio Books

The Place Between, Suzanne Moore, Journeys to Words Publishing

The Book Thief, Markus Zusak, Picador

The Book of Dust trilogy, Philip Pullman, Penguin Random House

The Shadow of the Wind, Carlos Ruiz Zafón, Penguin