About the book....

In her bestselling novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood masterfully took us to a chilling world of the future. In her astonishing new novel, *Alias Grace*, she just as convincingly takes us back 150 years and inside the life and mind of one of the most notorious women of the 1840s. Grace Marks is serving a life sentence for her part in the vicious murders of Thomas Kinnear, a wealthy land owner who employed her as a maid, and Nancy Montgomery, his housekeeper and mistress. James McDermott, who was hanged for the murders, accused Grace in his confession of leading him on and promising sexual favors in return for the murders, but Grace herself claims to have no memory of the killings. Weaving together sex, violence, the burgeoning science of psychiatry, and a good old-fashioned mystery, Atwood has created a novel--and recreated an era--of mesmerizing power.

About the author ....

**Margaret Atwood** was born in Ottawa in 1939, and grew up in northern Quebec and Ontario, and later in Toronto. She has lived in numerous cities in Canada, the U.S., and Europe.

She is the author of more than forty books — novels, short stories, poetry, literary criticism, social history, and books for children. Atwood’s work is acclaimed internationally and has been published around the world. Her novels include *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Cat’s Eye* — both shortlisted for the Booker Prize; *The Robber Bride*, winner of the Trillium Book Award and a finalist for the Governor General’s Award

**Discussion Questions**...

1. This novel is rooted in physical reality, on one hand, and floats free of it on the other, as Atwood describes physical things in either organic, raw terms (the "tongue-colored settee") or with otherworldly, more ephemeral images (the laundry like "angels rejoicing, although without any heads"). How do such descriptions deepen and reinforce the themes in the novel?
2. The daily and seasonal rhythm of household work is described in detail. What role does this play in the novel in regard to its pace?

3. What was your view of Mary Whitney before you met her in chapter 18? During the time she was working with Grace at Mrs. Alderman Parkinson's? When you hear of her again? Do the earliest references and asides about her illuminate her role in the novel later?

4. Atwood employs two main points of view and voices in the novel. Do you trust one more than the other? As the story progresses, does Grace's voice (in dialogue) in Simon's part of the story change? If yes, how and why?

5. Grace's and Simon's stories are linked and they have a kinship on surface and deeper levels. For instance, they both eavesdrop or spy as children, and later, each stays in a house that would have been better left sooner or not entered at all. Discuss other similarities or differences in the twining of their stories and their psyches.

6. Discuss the importance and use of dreams in the novel.

7. Atwood offers a vision of the dual nature of people, houses, appearances, and more. Discuss these manifestations of dark and light that are at bedrock in this novel.

8. Discuss how Atwood foreshadows certain events by dropping clues throughout the novel. Did you find key events surprising and inevitable?

9. In a letter to his friend Dr. Edward Murchie, Simon Jordan writes that "...Not to know--to snatch at hints and portents, at intimations, at tantalizing whispers--it is as bad as being haunted..." How are the characters in this story affected by the things they don't know?

10. Were you of the same mind regarding Grace's innocence or guilt throughout the novel? At what points did you waver one way or the other?

11. Did any character in the novel freely choose his or her course of action?

12. Why do you suppose the book is titled Alias Grace?

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