



LEADER'S GUIDE

THE LADIES OF THE LAKE BY CATHY GOHLKE



"The Ladies of the Lake do swear this day of our graduation from Lakeside Ladies Academy... that we shall stick by one another through thick and thin, maintain a healthy correspondence from wherever in the world our paths might wander, and be always at the ready to come to the aid of any sister among us in need. To the best of our ability, we vow to meet here, in this hallowed gazebo, every two years to reclaim and celebrate our sisterhood. Nothing but death will free us from these vows. Signed and sealed."

SUSANNAH, RUTH, DOROTHY AND ADELAIDE

THEMES

Redemption

Forgiveness

Fear

Friendship

Secrets

Love

Faith

Prejudice

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Suicide

Death

The Great War

Post Partum Haemorrhage

Bullying

Halifax Explosion

CHARACTERS

Adelaide MacNeill is a young orphan and aspiring writer from Prince Edward Island settling in at Lakeside Academy. After her parents' death, she was lonely and confused; however, as she began forming deep friendships with the ladies of the lake, she again found purpose and reignited her passion for writing. As an adult, Addie's misunderstandings and trauma catalyse her to remove herself entirely from the world she knew, and she decides to start again as *Rosaline Murray*.

Despite being a successful, wealthy and celebrated author, *Rosaline Murray* is also a recluse. Rosaline has many secrets which eat away at her, and between hiding in her library to write and tending her garden, Rosaline's only friend is the kind and wise Portia. Rosaline must begin to face the 'what ifs', misunderstandings, betrayals and consequences of her actions if she is to find hope, forgiveness and freedom.

Bernadette is seventeen years old and attending Lakeside Ladies Academy. She was raised as Rosaline's (Addie's) daughter, but unbeknownst to her, she is biologically Addie's orphaned niece. Her parents were killed in the Halifax Explosion, and she was secretly adopted by her aunt and given a new name so that she might remain with her family and be raised according to her mother's wishes.

Portia is one of Rosaline's dearest friends and fellow survivors of the Halifax Explosion. Having lost her husband and son in the explosion, Rosaline and Bernadette are all she has left, and she continues to nurse Bernadette to health after the blast. Seventeen years later, Portia is still a wise and faithful friend to Rosaline, encouraging her to be brave and face her past to move on with her future.

Ruth is one of the Ladies of the Lake. She is a pretty, kind and no-nonsense kind of girl. She stands tall and proud, always has impeccable posture, and is ready to plan and act when required. She takes no guff and passionately defends and fights for her friends.

Dorothy (Dot) is one of the Ladies of the Lake. She is a fiery, talkative, and sympathetic redhead. She befriends Addie, immediately becoming her best friend. Yet over time, she begins to feel like second best to Addie, eventually allowing a rift between them. In her adult life, she grieves her mistakes and decisions, and despite believing Addie is dead, she still lives as though she's second best.

Susannah is one of the Ladies of the Lake. She's a true Southern Belle, and although she has a sweet and feminine beauty, she has a sharp tongue and isn't afraid to speak her mind.

Stephen Meyer is a tender-hearted, honest young boy from a well-respected and loved German American family. He grew up alongside Dot but has loved Addie since he first saw her. His life was upended when their community began to cast baseless suspicion onto his family during the Great War, and he eventually was forced to serve to prove patriotism.

STORYLINE

While living in Prince Edward Island with her parents, Adelaide MacNeill had been a free-spirited, happy and loved little girl. After a devastating shipwreck claims her parents, Addie finds herself lonely and without a friend. Grieving, Addie forms a deep connection with author and mentor Lucy Maud Montgomery and her beloved Anne of Green Gables heroine, Anne Shirley. Addie is sent to Lakeside Ladies Academy, and while there, she forms deep friendships with Dot, Ruth and Susannah, the Ladies of the Lake.

Addie is beloved by many who know her and has many great prospects for her future at the Academy, but the one thing she desires most – the same thing that Dot desires – is Stephen. Things change rapidly with the Great War, America's involvement looming, and unmerited suspicion against German-American families. Addie is called away to Halifax to care for her pregnant sister-in-law, where she awaits Stephen's proposal. Stephen fails to show up without a word, and Dot withholds the letter to explain why he couldn't make it. Addie, believing the worst, gives herself over fully to the care of her family, assuming Stephen has neglected her and changed his mind. In a life-altering moment, Addie gets caught in the Halifax Explosion. Circumstances find her becoming a "sad and lonely girl, one full of hopes and dreams unfulfilled". In a desperate attempt to start over after the Halifax Explosion, Addie changes her name to Rosaline Murray, cutting ties with everyone and everything she's ever known.

"Seventeen years later, Rosaline Murray receives an unsuspecting telephone call from Dorothy, now headmistress of Lakeside, inviting her to attend the graduation of a new generation of girls, including Rosaline's beloved daughter. With that call, Rosaline is drawn into a past she'd determined to put behind her. To memories of a man she once loved . . . of a sisterhood she abandoned . . . and of the day she stopped being Adelaide MacNeill."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS



1

Q. The Ladies of the Lake are all unique with vastly different personalities. Which character, Addie, Dot, Susannah or Ruth, did you most relate to? Why?

TALKING POINTS

We may connect to a character for the following reasons:

- We feel empathy or sympathy for their circumstances.
- We share similar character traits or personalities.
- We share similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- We have made similar mistakes or poor decisions in our own lives.
- We like or dislike particular characters because of our experiences with others.

2

Q. Mrs Simmons befriends Addie in her time of need. How does her companionship help Addie in her struggles? Do you have a "Mrs Simmons" in your life?

TALKING POINTS

Mrs Simmons is God's provision of comfort and fellowship during one of the darkest times in her life; essentially, she is Christ's physical hands and feet. Mrs Simmons treats her kindly, listens to her story, prays for her and shows continued interest in Addie's life. Addie can give back to Mrs Simmons in her final days as she tenderly cares for her while she is capable on summer break.

Our "Mrs Simmons" may be a mother, grandmother, spiritual mother, godparent, extended family member, friend, pastor, or mentor – or we may desire a "Mrs Simmons" figure to come alongside us.

3

Q. At the story's beginning, Addie is a sad, frightened and lonely young orphan. How does she grow and change? Discuss the quote, "And God brought Rosaline Murray to life. She rose from the ashes" (Portia).

TALKING POINTS

"I don't want to resurrect Adelaide MacNeill. She was a sad and lonely girl, one full of hopes and dreams unfulfilled. I'm not her anymore. In so many ways, she died in the explosion."

- Portia contrasts Addie's transformation from a lonely orphan to Rosaline Murray to Joseph's Bible story. God took what was meant for evil and used it for her good.
- Addie's transformation is only complete upon the disclosure of her secrets, the offering of forgiveness to those who have harmed her, and the forgiveness she accepts from her friends.

4

Q. Susannah says, "Women need friends. Real true friends. And we're the best we've got." Forgiveness and redemption define the Ladies of the Lake and their friendship. However, for most of their lives, their friendship was often toxic. Discuss how the friendships blossomed and healed through faith and time.

TALKING POINTS

When the Ladies of the Lake were “young and foolish”, they prioritised their needs and wants over their friendships. They kept secrets, plotted selfish plans and strived to get their way without pausing to understand the impact they were having on one another.

- “Now we know better. We know where our bullying one another leads” (Ruth).
- At the end of the story, the Ladies of the Lake become true “sisters of the heart”.

5

Q. After the Halifax Explosion, Rosaline (Addie) and Portia support one another through their grief. How was Portia’s friendship with Rosaline instrumental in her healing and decision-making?

TALKING POINTS

Portia’s advice to forgive her friends and confess to Bernadette initiated new hope, forgiveness and healthy friendship:

- After so much bitter loss, Rosaline and Portia had a beautiful friendship built on mutual grief and love.
- Portia is wise and encourages Rosaline to confess the truth to Bernadette and the Ladies of the Lake.
- Although the foundations were built upon Rosaline’s (Addie) lies and made-up identity, Portia always knew deep down and loved her into wholeness through her faith, forgiveness and support to do hard things.

6

Q. Fear, envy and selfishness were the driving force behind many of Addie and Dot’s actions. Can you sympathise with the paths they chose to take? How might circumstances have changed if they had chosen to act out of love instead?

TALKING POINTS

Because of God’s promise in Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”, both Addie’s fear and Dot’s envy do not prevent forgiveness, redemption and hope for the future. Both women were able to confess their sins, repent, restore their friendship, and move forward together.

- Addie’s fear: Fear of rejection and abandonment cause Addie to remain in Halifax, changing her name and cutting ties with everyone from her past. Her fear is so profound that she is willing to forgo Bernadette’s graduation and let her down.
- Dot’s envy and selfishness: Dot’s envy is incredibly malicious and causes a rift in the friendship. She mourned her decision to withhold Stephen’s letter to Addie her entire life.

7

Q. How did the Great War impact the community? What prejudice was uncovered?

TALKING POINTS

War and hard times often bring out the best and worst in people. While Addie seeks to hold on to her friendship with the Meyer family, who had been well respected before the war, the rest of the community seeks to cut ties as they feign patriotism while succumbing to fear. Other determinantal consequences of fear were:

- The passing out of white feathers to “cowards” within the community, despite not knowing the circumstances of why those men were not at war.
- Bullying those who didn’t accept feathers led to the suicide of Cal Salley’s son.

8

Q. Ruth says, "Some scars we carry on the outside, but some we carry deep within. Both can be devastating. We're just better at hiding the inside scars from the world." Discuss the visible and hidden pain the characters endure. Why does hiding pain often make it worse?

TALKING POINTS

"What scars have you hidden?" (Addie):

- Ruth suffers from the loss of her brother, the private loss of Jack's death in the hospital bombing and the physical pain of cancer at 50.
- Dot suffers from deep regret and guilt over her jealousy and behaviour towards Addie and Stephen, so much so that it creates a physical barrier between her and her husband.
- Addie is both physically and emotionally devastated after the Halifax explosion, grief which compounds her already grieving heart over the death of her parents and her misunderstanding of Stephen's absence at the gardens for the proposal.
- The Meyer brothers are injured in the war and carry emotional scars from Addie's death and the prejudice against their family during the Great War.

9

Q. Do you have long-term friendships or childhood friends you're still close with? Would you say they are friendships of redemption and forgiveness?

TALKING POINTS

How can we cultivate life-giving and Christ-centered friendships?

In Christina Fox's book, 'Closer Than A Sister', Jen Wilkin shares, "Like all good gifts, Christian friendship is to be sought and stewarded with wisdom and grace." (p14).

- Sought; The seeking of life-giving, sister-friendships is a very intentional activity.
- Stewarded; As good stewards of our gifts, we lavishly pour into our sister-friends lives, seeking to be more others-focused and entering relationships wanting to bless others. Ultimately thinking more about our sister and less about what we can get from the friendship.
- Wisdom; God generously pours wisdom into our lives when we ask for it. We need His wisdom to enter into the right relationships and maintain those relationships as we grow and learn together.
- Grace; As imperfect women, we require grace to cover one another's faults, forgive one another, and flourish together (p14).

10

Q. Have you read Anne of Green Gables? If so, what do you love most about Anne?

TALKING POINTS

In the old-fashioned town of Avonlea, Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert seek an orphaned boy's help to keep Green Gables running. When dreamer Anne is sent instead of the desired boy, Marilla and Matthew must decide whether they will keep Anne at Green Gables with them or send her back to the orphanage. Anne's love of beauty and imagination blossoms at the thought of a forever home, but if she is to stay at Green Gables, she must learn to restrain her romanticism and become a well-mannered young lady. She is a whimsical dreamer who tries to fit in with the social norms of those around her while making innocent blunders socially, religiously and morally. Anne strives to follow the rules, but her tender beauty-loving heart is also stubborn, passionate, fiercely loyal and romantic, occasionally hindering her progress. Anne of Green Gables is a magical coming-of-age story about a whimsical young girl who deeply desires a place to belong, a life full of imagination and beauty, and a deep friendship with a kindred spirit.



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