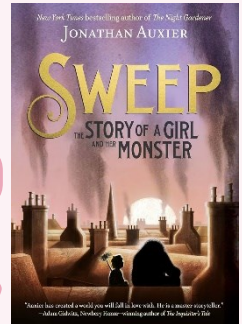




GIRL'S BOOK CLUB GUIDE



SWEEP

By Jonathan Auxier



“We save ourselves by saving others.” –Toby Squall

GENRE

Historical Fantasy Fiction

THEMES

Family

Home

Friendship

Magic

Sacrificial Love

Prejudice

Religion/Judaism

Child Labour

Poverty

Prejudice: Unfriendly feelings directed towards a particular group of people. In this story, people are prejudiced against Jewish members of the community.

CHARACTERS

Nan Sparrow

Nan is the main character of this story. She is raised by a man she refers to as “The Sweep”. When he passes away, she is found and indentured to become a child chimney sweep for Wilkie Crudd.

The Sweep

The Sweep is a loving father figure for Nan. He has very little, but he gives everything he has to make sure her needs are met.

Wilkie Crudd "The Clean Sweep"

Wilkie Crudd is a cold-hearted master who seeks out orphans and poor children to work as his chimney sweeps. Crudd has a reputation in town as a good businessman and makes an effort to appear well-dressed and charming to customers.

Roger

Roger, like Nan, works for Wilkie Crudd. He and Nan are both next in line to become Crudd's apprentice, which creates a rivalry between them. Roger was abandoned and sold unknowingly by his parents to work for Crudd, and it greatly inhibits his ability to love and connect with others. On the inside, he is hurt and scarred, but on the surface, he is harsh and unforgiving.

William "Newt"

Newt is one of the newest orphans to join Wilkie Crudd's climbing crew. He is naive, scared, and soft-hearted. Nan wants to protect him but knows little can be done for a child in their position.

Toby Squall

Toby is an orphaned child, like Nan and the other chimney sweeps. However, instead of working for a master, he attempts to make his own money (sometimes through dishonest means) while living on the streets. Toby is never far from Nan, partially due to his personal fondness toward her, and also because of a promise he made to The Sweep.

Miss Bloom

Miss Bloom teaches at a local girls' school where Nan is hired to sweep the chimneys. Miss Bloom can see the potential in Nan's brilliant mind and is moved to act when she sees the injustices the children face in their work. Miss Bloom was raised in a traditional Jewish family but chose to walk away from the religion and her family. Seeing Nan's struggles helps her to see family and faith in a new light.

Charlie

Charlie is the magical element of this story. Before The Sweep passed, he was able to turn a small piece of chimney soot and char into a golem/ protector for Nan to keep close by. Charlie eventually becomes a rather large monster and his magical powers and limitations are slowly revealed throughout the book.

STORYLINE

This story begins with a young girl named Nan Sparrow and a man known only as “The Sweep”. The Sweep is a loving, self-sacrificing father figure to Nan, but years of extreme poverty, homelessness and chimney sweeping have caused to him become very ill. When The Sweep knows he is about to die, he leaves little Nan sleeping on the roof of a successful chimney sweep’s place of business to ensure that she will have work and be able to survive. He also leaves behind his beloved hat, and a small, mysterious lump of still-warm chimney soot that Nan begins to carry with her wherever she goes.

Nan gets older and finds that chimney sweepwork is proving to be more challenging as she grows. One day while sweeping, she finds herself completely stuck within a fireplace flue. Her fellow chimney sweeper and rival, Roger, comes to free her but takes little pity on her situation. He lights a fire in the chimney to force Nan out. She nearly dies in the fire but finds that The Sweep’s char is much more of a gift than she realized.

This book is about the power of sacrificial love and its ability to overcome adversity, pain, and even death. This book reminds us of the sacrificial love of Jesus, and of how we can love others fully, even when we feel like we have nothing to give.

1 QUESTION ONE

Children, at one time, really did work as chimney sweeps and endured horribly unsafe environments. What reasoning would people at that time have used for allowing such cruelty to continue? Do you think similar situations still exist today?

2 QUESTION TWO

Who is the true monster in this story and how can appearances deceive us? Discuss the differences between Charlie and Crudd. Are there any similarities?

3 QUESTION THREE

How does Nan describe what a “home” is to Charlie? What does it tell us about her perception of home up to that point? How would you describe “home” to a person completely unfamiliar with the concept?

4 QUESTION FOUR

Why do you think Nan pushes Toby, and others, away? Does Toby seem worthy of her trust? Why does he continue his pursuit of her friendship?

5 QUESTION FIVE

When Nan follows Roger's mysterious journey on Easter, she finds out the heartbreaking truth of his past. He and Nan have similar backstories, but what makes them different? What do you think it would take for Roger to find true happiness?

6 QUESTION SIX

In what ways does Charlie change Nan's life? Discuss how Charlie helps Nan to feel safe, but also makes her feel afraid (p270).

7 QUESTION SEVEN

Why does Miss Bloom take such an interest in Nan's life? What uncomfortable truths does it open her eyes to?

8 QUESTION EIGHT

Why does the crowd react to the children's protest with anger and disappointment? How does Nan's singing change their hearts? (You might like to read the poem together from page 312).

9 QUESTION NINE

What do we find out about The Sweep's true relation to Nan? Is it what you expected? How does it make you feel about him? Name some other examples of self-sacrifice mentioned throughout the book.

10 QUESTION TEN

Why do you think Nan chose not to try and make a new golem like Charlie? Do you think she made the right decision? Why or why not?



This BTB Book Club Guide was written by Corinna Sanders.

Corinna Sanders is a married, homeschooling mother of 2. She loves to bake pies, do crafts and drink too much coffee. You can regularly find her leaving her local library with a gigantic stack of books.