

BOOK CLUB To Go!

Garden Spells

By Sarah Addison Allen

Introduction

The Waverleys are a curious family to the townspeople of Bascom, North Carolina. Legend has it that their feisty apple tree is enchanted, and that eating its fruit can show you the future. But no one foresaw how two very different sisters would spring from the same family roots.

Claire has never let go of her connection to family and lives alone in the old Waverley home, running a successful catering company and using ingredients from her magical garden.

It has been 10 years since Sydney Waverley abandoned the family she was so ashamed of, and now she's back – with a daughter and a suitcase packed with secrets. Healing the wounds of the past will take more than Claire's potent hyacinth wine, but the two sisters soon realize that they're more alike than either could have imagined.

From a bright new author in fiction, *Garden Spells* is a tale about how the strength of family ties can be as inexplicable as magic itself.

(Random House)

About the Author

"*Garden Spells* didn't start out as a magical novel," writes Sarah Addison Allen. "It was supposed to be a simple story about two sisters reconnecting after many years. But then the apple tree started throwing apples and the story took on a life of its own... and my life hasn't been the same since."

Allen was born and raised in North Carolina, and the character of her home terrain is recognizable even in the magical precincts of Bascom, the fictional community in which her novel unfolds. "The name of the town, and Lunsford's reservoir, the local swimming hole, mentioned in *Garden Spells*," Allen explains, "are subtle nods to Bascom Lamar Lunsford, the man who founded the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, purportedly the longest running folk festival in the nation."

The author has a B.A. in literature, a major she pursued, she says, "because I thought it was amazing that I could get a diploma just for reading fiction. It was like being able to major in eating chocolate. "She credits her father – a reporter and award-winning columnist for a local newspaper – for her 'stubborn writing genes'." And like Claire Waverley in *Garden Spells*, Allen herself has a sister named Sydney. She resides in Asheville, N.C.

(*LitLovers.com*)

Reviews

"Sarah Addison Allen's mainstream debut works best as a charming fairy tale – a final summer read before bookworms get buried under the avalanche of fall's literary heavyweights. Alice Hoffman fans will notice more than a few parallels with *Practical Magic* – a tale centered around two sisters – one staid, one wild – with a gift for household witchery. Although Allen doesn't have Hoffman's lyrical ability, and the novel's romantic subplots lack depth, she imbues *Garden Spells* with a Southern charm that readers won't want to resist any more than they would Claire's violet cake." –*The Christian Science Monitor*

Further Reading

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez

Practical Magic by Alice Hoffman

Like Water For Chocolate by Laura Esquivel

The Shop on Blossom Street by Debbie Macomber

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Possible Discussion Questions

1. Could you be persuaded that certain plants have powers, as Claire describes and uses them? If you believed you possessed the magical powers that Claire has inherited, how would you use them? What's the first thing you would do?
2. Which of the sisters resonates with you personally? Claire believes everything – everyone – is temporary. She clings to home and makes herself content. Sydney's philosophy is "you can't hold on to everything," and so has a history of very temporary, noncommittal relationships. Are their outlooks two sides of the same coin? What is the nature of the shift that occurs for each of them?
3. Sydney does what she feels she has to do in running with her daughter. What is your reaction to her dilemma, and her choice?
4. Sydney uses her birth name, Waverley, when she returns to her hometown, after hating the name all her life; she even gives her own daughter the Waverley surname. Why do you think she does this?
5. Do you relate to Emma's passion for Hunter John? Is it possible for someone else to manipulate personal circumstances as Emma and her mother do?
6. How do you explain Claire's attraction/repulsion to Tyler? Why do you think Claire sees violet sparks hovering around him the first time she meets him? What makes her eventually realize they are destined to be together?
7. Do you think a child can have the kind of insight and sensitivity that Bay demonstrates? Could a man have it? If not, why?
8. The four Waverley women in this novel (Claire, Sydney, Bay, Evanelle) have special gifts. Which of the four gifts would you like to have yourself? Why?
9. Fred observes, "You are who you are, whether you like it or not, so why not like it?" How does this statement relate to the different characters in the book?
10. Claire thinks, "When you tell a secret to someone, embarrassing or not, it forms a connection. That person means something to you simply by virtue of what he knows." Do you agree with this? Can a secret be a positive thing? A negative thing?

11. Which character changes the most over the course of the book? What does he or she learn? What had to take place in order for this to happen?
12. Do you consider this to be a “southern” novel? Besides its setting, what characteristics make it so?
13. If you knew that biting into a Waverley apple would reveal your future... would you bite? Why or why not?

(Random House)