

TWO WOMEN By Christene A. Browne

Book Club Reader's Guide

Author's Intro:

The novel Two Women was inspired by my mother and my ex mother in law, a Caribbean woman and a German woman who seemingly lived parallel lives. Both moved from their respective homes and ended up in the same low income community in Toronto (Regent Park) in less than ideal circumstances.

The book started off as a film script. After a reading with some actors I realized I had the beginnings of a novel.

In writing the book, I wanted to explore the issue of domestic violence and how it passed down, from generation to generation, from mother to daughter. What I ended up writing was in many ways a book about revenge.

The use of magical realism wasn't at all intentional. This aspect of the novel arose organically.

I attribute that to my Caribbean origins and my love of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novels.

The books follows in direct line with my work as a filmmaker and touches on many of the same themes I dealt with in my films; namely poverty and feminism.

I hope you enjoy the book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

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Brief Description of the Story



The story centers around Bernice and her daughter and the insulated world that they occupy.

To pass time Bernice tells her daughter stories that she claims originate from her dreams but her daughters or not too sure. When Bernice has a chance encounter one day with two of her neighbours in the hallway her imagination is sparked and she knows she has a new story.

The Five Women of Two Women

Bernice Archer – An old eccentric with a flair for storytelling. She is the original man hater. Her background is French Canadian.

She has two blind middle age daughter who she coddles and treat as children.

In the process of the novel she comes to grips with her mortality and starts to tell her daughters the stories that she has kept from them their whole life. She sees vision of people's lives in her dreams and forms stories from them.

Rose Weiss— is a timid woman from Western Europe. She comes from an abusive household.

She falls in love with an African exchange student only to discover that he doesn't love her.

She ends up marrying an overzealous suitor when she finds herself pregnant and abandoned.

All through her life she has felt that a part of her was missing.

Violet Black- is a dynamic woman from the Caribbean. She comes from an abusive household.

She falls in love with an older man and follows him to America.

All through her life she has felt that a part of her was missing.

Eva Archer– is the adult daughter of Bernice. She is mirror twin. She is the more domineering of the two. She is blind and a virgin and loves to masturbate and sing opera.

Ava Archer- is the adult daughter of Bernice. She is mirror twin. She is the more timid of the two. She is blind and a virgin and loves to masturbate and



sing opera. She is in love with the neighbourhood drug dealer.

Some Themes Dealt with in the book

Poverty, the immigrant experience, mother daughter relationships, the cycle of domestic violence, female strength, sexuality, mysticism, dreams, parallel lives, duality, revenge and the art of storytelling.

Discussion Questions

- 1. The story takes place in a low income community. Could this story have taken place in a middle class or affluent neighbourhood? Why? What does the character's socio-economic background add to the story?
- 2. Two Women is set in 70's, could this story happen today? Why? Why not?
- 3. How would have Bernice and her daughters lives been different had they had a television or radio? Would they still tell stories?
- 4.Do you believe Bernice's treatment of her daughters; Eva and Ava is justified? Could she have done better by them?
- 5. Why do you think Ava is so enthralled by the Stickman when Eva doesn't want anything to do with them? How are the twins similar? How are they different?
- 6. *Two Women* was inspired by two women from very diverse backgrounds who seemingly led parallel lives. What similarities do Rose and Violet share? What are the marked differences?
- 7.Bernice's mystical powers are questioned by her daughters and by Rose.



Why do you believe that Violet is the only one ready to accept Bernice's gift from the very beginning.

- 8. There are a few examples of mother daughter relationships in *Two Women*. Who do you feel have the best mother daughter relationship and why?
- 9. Some great examples of female strength can be seen in the *Two Women*, who do you feel is the strongest women in the novel and why?
- 10. Are the men in *Two Women* painted with all the same brush or are there noticeable differences?
- 11. The theme of revenge is central to the novel. Is the type of revenge sought out in the novel synonymous only to women?
- 12. Which of the characters do you relate to the most and why?
- 13. When Violet meets Rose for the very first time sharks fly much in the way when Rose meets Sam for the very first time. What do you believe is the true nature of Rose and Violet's connection?
- 14. Does Bernice's relationship with Violet and Rose save her or is it Violet and Rose who are saved by Bernice.
- 15. What do you believe is the best lesson that Bernice learns from the Violet and Rose. What is the best lesson Violet and Rose learn from Bernice?
- 16. What would have been the outcome of the story had Robert and Douglas left and never returned?
- 17. How do the elements of magical realism add to the story?



- 18. Who is the true villain in the book and how do you think that person arrived to that place?
- 19. What does Eva and Ava gain from having Violet and Rose in their life? What do Violet and Rose gain from Eva and Ava?
- 20. Whose fate are you most invested with in the story and why?
- 21. Which one of Bernice's story did you enjoy the most? Why?
- 22. Does the main conflict resolve itself in a satisfactory way? How else could have Violet and Rose resolved their issues?
- 23. In the end do Robert and Douglas get what they deserve? Is murder justified?