



*Reading group guide*



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# Discussion questions

1. Much like Clara, Virginia suffers a great loss—her mastectomy and the end of her marriage—and needs to reinvent herself. What other similarities and differences do you observe between Clara and Virginia? What are the strongest internal motivations for each woman? How do they bend away from and toward the social expectations of their eras? Could you see them being friends?
  2. When Fiona Davis moved to New York, she experienced the reverse transformation of Grand Central Terminal from a scary place you wouldn't want to be caught in past dark into a vibrant center of architecture and business. Have you witnessed this kind of change in a city, a specific building, or any location? What, if anything, do you think played a role in creating the changes that occurred? Did you lose or gain anything in the process?
  3. When Virginia takes the watercolor that she finds in the abandoned art school in Grand Central Terminal, she's unsure if it's the right thing to do. What are your thoughts on this choice? What does the watercolor represent to Virginia, if anything? Would you have taken the watercolor? Why or why not?
  4. *The Masterpiece* explores the many facets of the art world in the 1920s, including Clara's place in it as a woman who understands the value of pragmatism and determination. Think about how we view and experience art and artists today. Are there any stark differences and/or similarities between the present and the past? Art styles have certainly changed, but has our relationship with art and artists changed? Why or why not? Is there an art style or school that you prefer? Do you have any favorite artists?
  5. Clara is drawn to both Oliver and Levon, who couldn't be more different. Do you think she made the right choice? Who would you have chosen—if either—and why?
  6. While working in Grand Central, Virginia discovers a new appreciation for a building most believe should be destroyed. What are your thoughts on historic preservation? Should money be put into restoring and preserving the old, or does that prevent progress?
  7. Both Virginia's life and her daughter Ruby's life go through dramatic changes in *The Masterpiece*. These transitions cause conflict between mother and daughter, but Virginia's acceptance of Ruby's choices ultimately paves the way to a strong relationship. What are your thoughts on the way that Virginia handled this situation? How would you have handled it? Do any relationships in your life resemble the one between Ruby and Virginia?
  8. What do you think of Clara's actions after the train crash? What would you have done in her situation?
  9. In reality, the federal government gave unprecedented support to artists during The Great Depression. As part of the New Deal, museums were built and artists were paid with federal tax dollars. How do you feel that aligns with the fictional plot of the book? Do Clara and Levon's paths veer toward or away from what artists experienced in that era?
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